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THE OLD DRAMA AND THE NEW

THE OLD DRAMA AND THE NEW

AN ESSAY IN RE-VALUATION

BY

WILLIAM ARCHER

Author of "Play-Making," etc.

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TO WAAGEN

PREFACE

The Education Authority of the London County Council honoured me in 1920, and again in 1921, with an invitation to deliver, at King's College, a certain number of lectures on the drama, to audiences mainly composed of teachers. This book contains, with slight additions and retrenchments, the substance of my two courses of lectures.

Had I been a younger man, I should probably have recast my material in more permanent form, and attempted a new history of our dramatic development. There is ample room for such a work. Sir Adolphus Ward's stately chronicle of *English Dramatic Literature* ends with the reign of Queen Anne; and the intervening centuries have found no similar historian. The reason is not far to seek: namely, that the drama, as literature, had sunk very low in the eighteenth century, and had almost ceased to exist in the nineteenth. The field of research was certainly not an inviting one; yet the theatre was throughout these centuries a more or less popular institution, and from that point of view, if from no other, its history was, and is, worth writing. The revival of the past thirty years lends fresh interest to the subject. Only by examining the causes of the decrepitude of two centuries can we fully understand the causes of the rejuvenation we have witnessed.

But an adequate study of the subject, literary and sociological, would demand from five to ten years of unremitting labour; and I have arrived at a time of life when one does not lightly undertake such long engagements. Dryden's Almanzor could wave away the minions of Boabdelin, saying

> Stand back! I have not leisure yet to die!

—but in the workaday world one has to reckon with a tyrant who is more "strict in his arrest."

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I resolved, therefore, to retain the lecture form, with all its imperfections, and to content myself with giving a mere outline of the course of theatrical history, as I conceived it. The coming historian will have to fill in a thousand details. What I venture to hope is that, in the matter of perspective and proportion, he may find my sketch not too far astray.

In lectures, and especially in two courses of lectures, a certain amount of repetition is inevitable. I have reduced it in some measure, but I have not attempted entirely to eliminate it. Iteration, however tedious, is sometimes useful; particularly when "the question then to be considered" is the unsettling of inveterate habits of thought. Revaluations are like musical themes which must be a little harped upon (preferably in different keys) before they sink into the mind.

In Lecture VII, I have reprinted a few sentences from my Introduction to Farquhar in the Mermaid Series. Otherwise, the whole matter of this book now first appears in print.

W. A.

London, June 23, 1922.

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THE OLD DRAMA AND THE NEW

I

It must have struck everyone who has thought at all about the matter, that it is extremely difficult to reduce the various forms of drama to a common denominator, or, in other words, to find a standard of value which can be applied to all the multifarious productions which we lump together under the common designation of dramatic literature. Just think what dramatic literature includes! It ranges from the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus to *Potash and Perlmutter*, from the "No" plays of Japan to *Othello*, and from *Othello* to *Abraham Lincoln* on the one hand and *Charley's Aunt* on the other. Even if we keep on the heights and ignore what is merely trivial—a distinction not always easy to draw—how are we to find a common measure applicable to Sophocles, Kalidasa, Marlowe, Molière, Schiller, Ibsen and J. M. Synge? Or, without going to the ends of the earth and covering wide spaces of time, let us take three men who lived within a hundred years and within a few hundred miles of each other—Shakespeare, Calderón and Racine—how are we to bring them under one criterion of merit? We agree that they were all three great men; yet they are so utterly disparate that the greatness of one seems almost to exclude the greatness of the others. We can, perhaps, find something in common between Shakespeare and Calderón; but between the author of *King Lear* and the author of *Andromaque* there yawns what seems almost an impassable gulf. We know, indeed, that, for a century or more, the admirers of Racine could see in Shakespeare nothing but a "drunken savage"; and to this day there are not very

many of the admirers of Shakespeare who can sincerely declare that they have a keen relish for Racine.*

The term "drama," in fact, covers such widely different art-forms that comparisons between them are almost like comparisons between totally different arts—between music and painting, between architecture and fiction. To compare, say, the *Œdipus* of Sophocles with Goethe's *Faust* is about as difficult as to decide whether Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony or Rembrandt's *Night Watch* is the greater work of art.

It may be said, with some truth, that only a pedant would attempt to establish an order of merit among the world's great dramatists, as if they were candidates in a competitive examination. The wiser course, no doubt, is to enjoy as many different forms of drama as we can, without troubling too much about questions of precedence.

Yet there is a distinct disadvantage in the extreme uncertainty of the critical standards which we apply to drama. It leads, for one thing, to this result, that we probably hear more wild and futile chatter about the drama than about any other art. People fail to realise the technical conditions of drama, and think that, in the case of so simple a matter as play-writing, everyone is as good a judge as his neighbor. With regard to music and painting, you will hear people modestly confess that they have no expert knowledge, though "they know what they like." With regard to drama, they are troubled with no such diffidence. They not only know what *they* like, but they know what *you* ought to like, and more especially what you ought to despise. Twenty years ago, I went to the United States to write a short series of articles on the American stage for an English magazine owned by an American gentleman—why should I not name the late Lord Astor? Before I started I had an interview with my employer, who told me, as if he were laying down an undisputed and indisputable axiom, that I should find two forms of drama in America: first, plays adapted from

*This is not an indirect confession of personal distaste. I have the warmest admiration for the author of *Phèdre*, *Andromaque* and *Britannicus*. For a masterly appreciation of Racine see Mr. Lytton Strachey's *Books and Characters*.

the French, which were patronised and approved by the best people; second, native American plays, which were quite beneath contempt. I did not tell him that, if this had been the true state of the case, my articles would not have been worth paying for. As a matter of fact, I found American managers too much addicted to adaptations from the French; but at the same time I found the perfectly manifest beginnings of a native American drama, sincerely and competently portraying American life. That drama has in the intervening years so increased and multiplied that we find frequent complaints of the flooding of the London stage with American plays. Yet I am quite sure that there are many people in America today who have not wakened up to the new state of affairs, and are still convinced that there exists no American drama worth mentioning. This frame of mind, though deplorable, finds its excuse precisely in the vagueness of critical standards of which I am speaking.

Another highly regrettable fact is this: the nature of dramatic intelligence is so little understood that men without the smallest scintilla of it not infrequently devote themselves with great ardor to the production and criticism of drama. How many thousands of plays have been written by men who had no conception of what a play really is! Most of them, of course, have been mercifully forgotten; but the names of a few are still cited with formal respect, though to the vast majority of people they are names and nothing more. A more remarkable fact is that some of the most highly esteemed dramatic criticism in the language (and I fancy in other languages as well) has been written by men who had no clear conception—or perhaps a clear misconception—of the real nature of drama. Are there, I wonder, color-blind painters and critics of painting? One is sometimes tempted, in these days, to answer the question in the affirmative; but I am sure they are not, and can never have been, so numerous as drama-blind dramatists and critics of drama.

Of those who confidently pass judgment, written or oral, on plays ancient and modern, how few have given any

thought to this question: what is the essence of drama, as distinct from its adjuncts and accidents? The fact that it has adjuncts and accidents—that it avails itself, more or less, of the aid of all the other arts—is commonly recognised. But people do not ask themselves: what is its ultimate, its inmost nature? Or if they ask and answer the question, they fail to make the answer the basis for a rational standard of values.

In the survey of the English drama, old and new, which we are now undertaking, I propose to begin by enquiring whether we can discover in the history of drama as a whole any guiding principle of evolution. Such a principle, indeed, would not be the same thing as a standard of values, but might at any rate save us from falling into certain glaring errors of appreciation or depreciation.

We do not sufficiently realise the fact that drama springs from two sources, consists of two elements, and that a conflict between these two elements is continually going on. If on examination we should find that the history of drama was the history of the disjunction, so to speak, of these elements, so that each might develop on its own lines, and two (or three) pure arts take the place of one mixed or heterogeneous art, might we not recognise in that segregation a principle of progress, and agree to accept the casting out of heterogeneous matter as at all events a move in the right direction?

What are the two sources from which drama arose? They are, to put it briefly, *imitation* and *passion*.* We all know the meaning of "imitation" and I need not enlarge upon it. The term "passion," on the other hand, calls for some explanation. I use it to signify the exaggerated, intensified —in brief, the lyrical or rhetorical—expression of feeling. Perhaps a still more general term than "lyrical" might be

*It is very tempting to identify "imitation" with the Greek "mimesis" (applied in the main to the "ethos," or character, of ordinary human beings), and "passion" with the Greek "pathos." But it appears on enquiry that the Greek words have no exact equivalents in English. Even "mimesis" meant originally "the state of mind of the inspired dancer representing or becoming his god"; while "pathos" meant "something external that happens to the person, either (1) a disaster, like being hanged, or (2) lunacy or ungovernable rage." The fact that the terms came to be loosely used even in antiquity does not justify us in using them as synonymous with—or even strictly analogous to—modern terms.

employed—one might say "rythmic." Passion was expressed in primitive ages not only by the voice, but by rhythmic motions of the body; and the drama, all over the world, has grown out of dancing quite as much as out of song. Not only passion, indeed, but also imitation was conventionalised in mimetic dances.

For the practical purposes of criticism, the two elements in drama may be set down as faithful or would-be faithful imitation and wilful, sometimes hysterical, exaggeration. My suggestion is that, until quite recent years, the disentangling of these elements was very imperfectly effected, and that the final casting out of the exaggerative or lyrical element which has occurred almost in our own time is merely the culmination of a process which has been going on for centuries, and is thus to be accepted as an inevitable step in advance. The modern realistic drama is a pure and logical art-form. The other elements of primitive drama, the lyrical and the saltatory, have been sloughed off and have taken independent form in music-drama, commonly known as opera, and in ballet. These cannot be called pure art-forms, for they cannot dispense with the element of imitation, which is, after all, the prime essential of drama. The very idea of intensification implies a basis of reality—something sober and unintensified to be seized upon and worked up. But if not pure arts, they may at least be called consistent, inasmuch as intensification is the law of their being, which they consistently obey. *Tristan and Isolde* is a more consistent work of art than (for instance) *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is entirely steeped in an atmosphere of rhythmic passion, whereas in Shakespeare's plays sober imitation is constantly mingling with the lyricism by which they are essentially inspired. On the other hand we have modern love-plays from which lyricism is sternly excluded, except in so far as love is actually lyrical in its utterances. One may instance Max Halbe's *Jugend* or Sir Arthur Pinero's *Iris* or *Letty*. My argument is not, of course, that these plays are greater than Shakespeare's because they are more logical in their form. The measure of a play's great-

ness is certainly not to be found in anything so simple as its adherence to one convention. What I do say is that the modern plays are not to be despised, but rather to be welcomed, because they represent the completion of a long process of development.

Let us look more closely into the historical evidence for the theory which I have roughly outlined. It is of course in Greece that the origin of drama, as of all the arts, can be most conveniently studied.

"Fundamentally," says Professor Gilbert Murray,* "Tragedy was the mimetic dance of the Dionysus Religion"; and he goes on to define the Dionysus Religion as "the ritual of the Spring, of the New Year, of 'le Renouveau'—the Renewal after the dead winter of all the life of the world." In another place† Professor Murray says, "The life of the Year-Dæmon, as it seems to be reflected in Tragedy, is generally a story of Pride and Punishment. Each year arrives, waxes great, commits the sin of Hubris, and then is slain. The death is deserved; but the slaying is a sin: hence comes the next Year as Avenger, or as the Wronged One re-risen." Of course Professor Murray has to admit that "Tragedy extended its subject-matter beyond Dionysus or any other mere Renouveau-spirit, first to other vegetation-heroes of diverse sorts, then to all the heroes of Epic." Professor Ridgeway,‡ on the other hand, argues that the epic element was primary, and long preceded the introduction into Hellas of the Thracian god Dionysus. He holds the *thymele* to be, not, in its origin, at any rate, an altar of Dionysus, but the tomb of this or that local hero, round which his townsmen or countrymen executed mimetic dances representing his exploits and his sufferings—a species of memorial celebration which was supposed to propitiate the departed spirit, and to ensure that the earth, through his kindly interposition, should bring forth her fruits. "On the top of this primeval worship," says Professor Ridgeway, "came in a Thracian cult of a wild orgiastic kind, a ritual

English Literature and the Classics, Oxford, 1912, p. 8.
†*Four Stages of Greek Religion*, New York, 1912, p. 47.
‡*The Origin of Tragedy*, Chap. I.

kewise regarded as beneficial for promoting vegetation and crease of food." "This new religion," he proceeds, "was radually engrafted in many places on old local cults of eroes," but "the only true Dionysiac element was the dithy-mb, which dealt with the sorrows and adventures of Dio-ysus and his Satyrs." It is not for me to attempt to hold e balance between two such authorities. Perhaps, indeed, e difference between them is rather one of emphasis than substance. It is sufficient for my purpose that they agree representing the utterance of emotion, now sorrowful, and gain triumphant, as the essential factor in primitive trag-dy, the imitation of actions being subsidiary. In other ords, the lyric element (with dancing to mark its rhythms) ominated and overshadowed the mimetic element. I may dd that Mr. F. M. Cornford, in his interesting book, *The rigin of Attic Comedy*, accepts Professor Murray's account the origin of tragedy, and argues, I think convincingly, at the Old Comedy sprang from the same root, preserving, deed, the ritual form more clearly than did tragedy. No ne can fail, at any rate, to recognise in the comedy of Aris-phanes an art of lyrical intensification.

It would not be difficult, but it would take far too long, show the germs of drama presenting themselves in pre-sely similar forms among primitive and even savage eoples throughout the world. The Sanscrit word for drama *-natya*—originally means a dance. The oldest form of rama now existing unaltered in any country—the Japanese No"—is still called a "dance" rather than a play, is in-nsely lyrico-rhetorical in character, and relegates anything ke pure imitation to the "kyogen" or farces, interspersed tween the pompous and highly conventionalised lyric amas. The Greek masks were not an invention of the ellenic genius to lend dignity to gods and heroes, but were legacy from primitive times, and have today their counter-rts among primitive peoples. They were, says Professor urray,* "first magical, then sacred, and in the end at least matter of dignified convention." The mask survives in

English Literature and the Classics, p. 16.

the "No" dances (worn only, I think, by women and demons); and in the Chinese theatre, though it does not appear that masks are in use, heroes and warriors plaster their faces with a positive veneer of war-paint. Everywhere we find exaggeration, intensification, lording it over upon simple imitation—one halfpenny-worth of imitative bread to an intolerable deal of exaggerative stock.

Even when the imitation of quasi-historic action began to differentiate itself from lyric and rhythmic passion,—in other words, when dialogue came into being—it was natural that gods and heroes should use a language appropriate to themselves. Hence the cothurnate speech which has been the inseparable characteristic of tragedy down to our own day. The historic sense, indeed, was not very widely awake either in the Athens of Sophocles or in the London of Shakespeare; yet it would doubtless have struck their audiences as incongruous if they had attempted to show—I will not say demigods—but even plain men of bygone ages speaking (like Monsieur Jourdain) the prose of the passing day. The difficulty of finding an appropriate idiom necessarily confronts everyone who tries to write drama of the past, whether it be founded on myth, legend, history or pure imagination. Mr. John Masefield, in his *Pompey the Great*, has tried to ignore or override the difficulty by the free use of modern speech—but I cannot say that I find the experiment successful. The easiest and almost invariable solution of the problem, from the earliest to the latest times, has been to make the people of the past—all the more if it be "a past that never was present"—express themselves in verse. This meant that the dialogue of great poets was constantly suffused with lyricism, while that of little poets or no-poets was stiffened with rhetoric.

It is obvious that an actor who speaks in verse cannot be practising pure imitation. He is speaking as no man ever spoke in real life, and his carriage, his gestures, his facial expression are bound to be more or less modified in harmony with his utterance. So-called "poetic" dialogue, too, always and inevitably tends to run into long speeches, set-pieces,

what the French call "tirades." The Greeks, indeed, occasionally adopted that brisk thrust-and-parry of single verses which they called "stichomythy"; but it occurred only in isolated passages, seldom of great length. Much more frequently their heroes and heroines deserted even the iambic and indulged in outbursts in lyric measures, comparable to the arias in Italian opera. And the same tendency is evident in the Elizabethans, even although they seldom broke through the form of blank-verse, more or less interspersed, perhaps, with rhymes. For instance, what is Constance's outburst in *King John*,—"Grief fills the room up of my absent child" and so forth—what is it but a passionate "threnos," a keening, a wail? To describe it as a speech is absurd—it is a song if ever there was one. So, too, is Othello's:

> O! now, for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content!
> Farewell the plumèd troop and the big wars
> That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
> Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
> The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
> The royal banner, and all quality,
> Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
> And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
> The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
> Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

What is this but an exquisite and thrilling lyric? And how enormously does the lyric element preponderate throughout those marvellous final scenes of *Antony and Cleopatra!*

> *Antony.* The miserable change now at my end
> Lament nor sorrow at: but please your thoughts,
> In feeding them with those my former fortunes
> Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o' the world,
> The noblest; and do now not basely die,
> Not cowardly put off my helmet to
> My countryman, a Roman by a Roman
> Valiantly vanquish'd. Now, my spirit is going;
> I can no more.
>
> *Cleopatra.* O! wither'd is the garland of the war,
> The soldier's pole is fall'n: young boys and girls

> Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
> And there is nothing left remarkable
> Beneath the visiting moon.

But why should I go through Shakespeare, picking out passages which are not speech, but song? We can all recall them by the score. And what is not song is in great part oratory—rhythmic rhetoric, always with a lyric thrill in it. Shakespeare, no doubt, could also write, even in blank verse, the liveliest, the supplest dialogue. None the less is it true of a very large part of his work that it consists, like Greek tragedy and Italian opera, of an alternation between recitative and aria.

And this description applies to all verse drama—certainly to that of Corneille, Racine and Victor Hugo, and still more clearly to that of Lope and Calderón. The better it is, the more fully it justifies itself, the more manifestly does it hover on the verge of music. In Greek drama, of course, it crossed the verge: Greek tragedy was in effect opera, Greek comedy, the Old Comedy, at any rate, was musical extravaganza. It is true that the great mass of English blank-verse drama seems very far indeed from hovering on the edge of music; but that is because it is bad, uninspired, dead. The verse was a mere convention, adopted partly because it was the unquestioned habit of the hour, partly because it was, in a very real sense, easier to write than prose. Nevertheless we shall find, I think, that all the blank-verse plays which lived on the stage during the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, did so in virtue of certain bravura passages which great actors and actresses treated with a virtuosity entirely comparable to that of an accomplished singer, and very far remote from the direct or literal reproduction of anything in nature. Imitation, in a word, was swamped in passion.

But, from the earliest times and in all times, direct, unconventionalised, uncothurnate imitation must have held its place alongside of the rhythmic, impassioned, exalted imitation proper to hero-worship and season-celebration. The mimetic instinct is nature's great instrument of educa-

tion. The child, whether savage or civilised, is a born actor. Imitation is, and always has been, the basis of most of his games. When we see the children of today playing at shop-keeping or at visiting, we are in presence of the germ of realistic drama. At all times, too, there must have been men endowed with a special talent for that copying of individual peculiarities which we call mimicry; and at all times other men must have delighted in the exercise of this talent. Mimicry doubtless played a large part in the rude farces, the ancestors of the rough-and-tumble "turns" of the modern music-hall, which were from of old a common feature of popular merry-makings. But the curious adherence to the use of masks in comedy—in the New as well as the Old, in Menander as well as in Aristophanes—must have prevented the development of anything like soberly realistic acting in Greece and Rome. The classical drama, as a whole, contains no approach to a serious presentment of contemporary, or recent historical, character. Aristophanes gives us lampoons upon Socrates, Euripides and Cleon, but no serious portrait of Pericles or Alcibiades, or of any imaginary character representing their class. Terence dealt exclusively in the stock figures of Menander and the New Comedy. He made no attempt to put on the stage the Roman patricians of his own day—the equivalents of his patrons Scipio and Laelius. No Roman dramatist has drawn men of the type of Cicero or Lucullus or Mæcenas—in fact, of the contemporary gentleman. What would we not give for a Latin play (written, say, under Augustus or Tiberius) depicting the life and death of Julius Cæsar as John Drinkwater has depicted the life and death of Abraham Lincoln! Antiquity never rose (I say deliberately rose, not sank) to anything like the sober, unexaggerated portrayal of contemporary character on the stage. Its sculptors produced magnificent contemporary portraits, its dramatists did not. Even Menander probably drew no portrait with the pen at all comparable to that portrait of himself, now in the Vatican, which is one of the inestimable treasures of antique sculpture.

I admit, however, that it is not quite easy to fit Menander into my generalisation. If it be true, as Churton Collins* tells us, that one large section of his plays "depicted the social and fashionable life of Athens, and seems in truth to have depicted every phase of it, suggesting the comprehensive fullness with which Balzac treated of modern Paris" —if this be true, then we must admit that the Greek genius anticipated in a few decades the course of development which I am now essaying to trace through several centuries of the history of modern drama. But Churton Collins does not produce the evidence for his statement, and I must leave it to scholars to decide whether such evidence exists. The statement is certainly not borne out by the evidence of the adaptations from Menander and the New Comedy which we possess in Plautus and Terence. In the Roman Comedy we have exaggerative and lyrical methods applied to subjects chosen from a very narrow social domain, as different as possible from the enormous field which fell under the observation of Balzac, or indeed of any other great modern novelist. We live in a world of intrigue, the moving spirit of which is almost always the cunning and resourceful slave, while the puppets he works are the established types of the "senex" or heavy father, the "adolescens", the more or less dissolute son, the courtesan and her rapacious mother or manageress, the slave-girl who almost always proves to be the long-lost daughter of one of the heavy fathers, the braggart soldier, Pyrgopolinices or Thraso, the parasite, Gnatho, the "ancilla", the "nutrix" and a few other established types, or, as we may rather put it, conventional personæ or masks. The world is an exceedingly small one, the long arm of coincidence is untiringly busy, recognitions by means of rings or other tokens—what we describe generically as strawberry-marks—are favorite means of solving every tangle, and individual psychology seldom gets beyond the rudimentary stage of insistence on some one peculiarity, such as avarice, self-tormenting pessimism, a stern or a genial conception of the duties of parenthood. No attempt is made at

*Essays and Studies, p. 341.

the faithful reproduction of the surfaces of life. The whole action always passes in an open place or street, on which the houses of the principal characters abut. Soliloquies are constantly used, not as representing the speaker's reflections, but for the undisguised purpose of conveying information to the audience; and, in every second scene, these soliloquies are overheard by other persons on the stage—the ultimate abandonment and repudiation of verisimilitude. Nor must it be forgotten that these Roman plays were in effect comic operas. For each of Terence's comedies music was composed by Flaccus, the freedman of Claudius, sometimes "tibiis paribus", sometimes "imparibus"—which seems to mean that the pipes were sometimes in unison and at other times harmonised. And what Flaccus composed, I take it, was not merely incidental music, but accompaniments to the voice during the frequent lyrical passages—much less frequent, it is interesting to note, in Terence than in his predecessor Plautus.

Pray do not suppose that I am depreciating the Latin comedy. It is a most interesting form of drama, humane and highly civilised in comparison with our own minor Elizabethan and Restoration comedy,* presenting broad types of character with admirable vivacity, full of shrewd worldly wisdom which was not so hackneyed two thousand years ago as it is today, and abounding in those pleasant *jeux de scène*, tricks of the stage, which Molière borrowed so freely, and which are quite legitimate expedients in the art of laughter-moving. I am merely pointing out that exact imitation, whether of the surfaces of life or of individual refinements of character, was not the point at which Plautus and Terence aimed. Lyrical exaggeration, not sober fidelity, was the method and end of their art.

But the question remains: do they, or do they not, fairly represent the New Comedy of Athens and its great master, Menander? Scholars, I repeat, must decide: my own impression is that, while they doubtless obscured certain aspects of Menander's genius, what was lost was some form of

*See p. 199 for note on the relation between the *Eunuchus* of Terence and Sir Charles Sedley's *Bellamira*.

beauty, poetry, romance, rather than of realistic faithfulness and subtlety. Had there been anything of the Balzac in the great Athenian, Cæsar would not have called Terence a "half Menander," but a quarter or an eighth part of the master. If I am right in believing that Menander did *not* portray the social, fashionable and intellectual life of Athens with anything like Balzacian fidelity and wideness of outlook, the question arises: why, in his hundred comedies, did he fail to do so? Why, in other words, did the Greeks not develop a truly realistic drama? The answer lies partly, no doubt, in the before-mentioned fact of their curious adherence to the use of masks. But what was the reason of this conservatism? It is to be found, I imagine, in that association of drama with religion which led them to regard plays as functions at which a whole community could assist, and prevented them from inventing that indispensable instrument of realism, the small or moderate-sized theatre.* This line of thought must be worked out by some classical scholar who is at the same time familiar with the development of modern drama. Such a man could scarcely undertake a more useful task than a history of "Realism and its Limitations in the drama of Antiquity." His business would be to examine how far, and in what sense, that magnificent compliment of the old grammarian was justified: "Oh, Menander and life, which of you imitated the other?" He might—who knows?—come to the conclusion that Menander did actually anticipate, more nearly than we are apt to suppose, the social drama of Dumas and Pinero, Hauptmann and Ibsen.

As soon as the mask was abandoned in mediæval and modern times, the instinct for pure imitation asserted itself on the stage. We cannot doubt that already in the Miracles and Moralities there were many "corners," as the French say, of realistic acting—such, for instance, as the episode of the sheep-stealer, Mak, in the *Secunda Pastorum* of the Towneley Plays. It is true that almost down to our own

*The stage of the Roman theatre was about six times as wide as an average modern stage —180 feet as against 30. Moulton, *Ancient Classical Drama*, p. 380.

time realism showed a constant tendency to decline into caricature or buffoonery. Sober character-acting, as we now call it, is mainly a product of the past century and a half. But it was by no means unknown even to the Elizabethans. To talk of Falstaff as a "sober" character-part may seem paradoxical, but it is scarcely incorrect. Falstaff is not a caricature, like (for example) Bardolph or Pistol: he is a masterly portrait of a colossal humourist. The Falstaff type abounds to this day: he merely embodies it in unrivalled perfection. And though Shakespeare's art is, in the main, as we have seen, lyrical and exaggerative, he presents many figures which call for sober realism in presentation. He himself is said to have played one of these figures—Adam in *As You Like It*. Scores of other instances could easily be cited. Is not Hamlet himself, in the quieter passages, such as the advice to the Players, a very faithful and spirited portrait of a gentleman?

On the Japanese stage of today we find the same blending, or rather the same juxtaposition, of exaggerative and realistic art. The Japanese popular hero is exaggerative to a degree probably unknown even in the days when Herod, Pilate and Termagant used to rampage about the "pageant" stages of the mediæval market-place. The most horribly contorted visages that you find in Japanese prints are portraits, not caricatures, of popular actors. Emotion is often expressed by means of acrobatic feats of no mean accomplishment. Despair and frenzy are commonly indicated by the assumption of a violent squint. I have seen a daimyo in Japanese drama commit hara-kiri on the open stage, and sit for at least twenty minutes bleeding profusely, squinting horribly, and indulging in the most indescribable facial contortions. After this had gone on for some time, it was felt that tragic effect demanded the disarrangement of the hero's hair; whereupon two black-robed and hooded attendants, presumed to be invisible, crept in behind him and fluffed out his tresses until they made of him a sort of swarthy Shock-Headed Peter, he, meanwhile, proceeding undisturbed with his dying agonies. The force of exagger-

ative convention could no further go; and yet, in this very same play, there were several low-life characters, represented with the most exquisite fidelity—with an art as subtle and delicate as that of the most skilful ivory-carver.

So it must have been throughout the history of acting. Everywhere truth of imitation must have underlain, and frequently broken through, exaggerative intensity of passion. And this breaking-through, as it seems to me, is the first and last word in the development of the modern drama.

Imitation was always, so to speak, the indispensable substratum of drama; but it was everywhere overlaid in early ages by what I have called passion, expressing itself in rhythmic movement and lyrical utterance. Slowly, very slowly, has imitation come into its own, and the stage learnt to hold a plain, unexaggerating, undistorting mirror up to nature. The character-actor, the man who finds his models in the drawing-room, the counting-house, the workshop, the cottage and the street, has gradually supplanted not only the tragedian but the professional comedian — the habitual funny-man who carried his grinning mask, his "mug", through every part he played.* And this refinement, this toning down as it were, of the methods of acting has gone hand in hand with a corresponding refinement and subtle elaboration of the methods of authorship. That something has been lost in the process nobody would deny. The impassioned tragedy and luxuriant comedy of the past gave infinite pleasure in their day and offered a field for the manifestation of superb genius. But the change is quite wrongly described and deplored as a process of degeneration. On the contrary, it may rather be called a process of purification—the liberation of pure drama, of faithful and consistent imitation of life, from a number of conventional and heterogeneous adjuncts. The drama has sloughed off, as it were, those exaggerative elements which now find their characteristic expression in opera, ballet and extravaganza, and has become an art of interpretation through faithful delinea-

*Several of Charles Lamb's favorite actors were comedians of this type—Munden, for instance, and Liston. They survived within my recollection in such actors as J. L. Toole, J. S. Clarke and W. Penley. They are now practically confined to the musical-comedy and variety stage.

ion. That this new art has been responsible for an enormous mass of trivialities and vulgarities no one would dream of denying: when were trivialities and vulgarities excluded from the stage? But the new art, though barely a century has passed since it definitely disengaged itself from the heterogeneous elements which had so long overlain it, has already a long list of masterpieces to its credit; and who can doubt that the future belongs to it?

We shall, of course, find that the line of evolution must be traced through comedy rather than tragedy. Tragedy has from the first been an affair of exaggerative convention, dealing with the sufferings, in many cases, of actually superhuman beings, and in other cases of human beings enlarged to superhuman dimensions, and endowed with superhuman powers of utterance. Comedy, on the other hand, has always striven instinctively to break through exaggerative conventions. From the Elizabethan age onwards, we constantly find it unwittingly, so to speak, abandoning exaggeration, and indulging, if only for five minutes at a time, in sober imitation. Here, I think, we may say that England played the pioneer part. There is a great deal of realism to be found in Elizabethan comedy,—generally Hogarthian and brutal, but genuine so far as it goes. The development of a truly realistic drama was prevented, I think, by two facts. In the first place, the traditional conception of "comedy" was overpoweringly strong. It was regarded as a form of art which existed simply and solely for the purpose of causing laughter; and to that end violent exaggeration, both in incident and in character, was the obvious, indispensable means. In the second place, the realistic portrayal of life demands a realistic environment or background, which we know that the platform stage of the Elizabethans did not supply. The growth of modern drama has been accompanied and conditioned by an ever-increasing harmony between the action and its background, its scenery. Now that the evolution has been completed, and interior scenes, at any rate, can be, as it were, bodily transferred from real life to the stage, there is a natural reaction against

realism, and we are offered all sorts of futurist, and cubist, and symbolist settings. The movement is a very interesting one: purely imaginative settings are entirely desirable for purely imaginative plays. But plays of sober imitation demand sober imitation in their environment; and the great plays of the past half-century have been, with few exceptions, plays of sober imitation on the surface, whatever depths might be concealed beneath that surface. When Eleonora Duse engaged Gordon Craig to design scenery for Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, it was like engaging William Blake to illustrate *Tristram Shandy*.

Elizabethan tragedy, too, now and then showed a disposition to put off the cothurnus and apply itself to the sober imitation of life. Such a play as *Arden of Feversham* anticipated by a century and a half some, at any rate, of the theories of Diderot, and offered a specimen of the bourgeois drama. So, too, Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* anticipated in its essence, though not in its form, some of the problem plays of modern times. But, in the main, tragedy remained true to type. The tragic poet said, with more or less emphasis, "Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night," and set forth to make your flesh creep, just as the comic poet set forth to make you split your sides. It did not occur to either of them that his primary task was to interest his audience by the skilful portrayal of some crisis in real life, and that if he could do this he might let the emotional effect take care of itself. It took upwards of two centuries, counting from the advent of Shakespeare, to shake off the tyranny of the categories, and realise that the business of the stage was to look life straight in the face and not from any predetermined angle. The disappearance in modern drama of the hard-and-fast line of demarcation between tragedy and comedy has often been noted, and sometimes set down as a symptom of degeneration. It marks, in fact, the completion of an age-long process, and the final release of drama from the fetters imposed upon it by a tradition which had its origins in prehistoric tribal life.

Here, then, we have, I think, some approach to a rational

principle of appreciation: we can recognise as good, as in harmony with an inevitable tendency, any abandonment of exaggerative, in favor of soberly imitative, methods. We see that in rejecting the rant and rhetoric of conventional tragedy, the habitual over-emphasis, often passing into buffoonery, of conventional comedy, we have not been falling away from a state of æsthetic grace, but purifying the art of drama from extrinsic elements. We recognise the emptiness of the often-repeated complaint that we neglect on the modern stage the marvellous treasures of our classical drama, from, I suppose, Marlowe to Sheridan Knowles. The truth is that a just instinct has told us that the great mass of Elizabethan, Restoration and eighteenth-century plays have nothing to say to modern audiences, because they exemplify primitive and transitional types of art, portray, with much exaggeration, gross and unpleasing manners, and call for forms of virtuosity in representation which are well-nigh extinct on the modern stage. The towering genius of Shakespeare overcame the imperfections of the form in which he worked, and gave to the stage of the whole world a series of ever-living masterpieces; but even in regard to Shakespeare it is folly to deny that a good many of his minor works, and a good many passages in his major works, belong to his age and not to all time. That is not to say that I am opposed to revivals of his minor works, and even of certain plays of his contemporaries and immediate successors. There is room on a well-organised stage for educational and antiquarian performances. What I do say is that the people who extol the semi-barbarous drama of the minor Elizabethans as something vastly superior to the drama of today have no conception of the true essence of drama, and found their opinion (in so far as it has any rational foundation at all) on a palpable confusion between drama and lyric poetry. They deplore as an unmixed disaster that sloughing-off of the extrinsic elements of passion and exaggeration which I, on the contrary, represent to you as not only an inevitable, but in the main an extremely desirable, process.

I think we shall find, however, that the advance of dramatic art has consisted, not merely in the negative process of casting out extraneous and illogical elements, but also in the positive process of acquiring a technique appropriate to the great end in view—that, namely, of interesting theatrical audiences by the sober and accurate imitation of life. This has been only in a minor degree a conscious and deliberate process of reform. It has been for the most part a gradual and inevitable result of changes of material conditions—such as the shrinkage in the size of theatres, the substitution of reality for make-believe in scenic environment, the development of improved methods of lighting, etc., etc. Take, for instance, the soliloquy and the aside: When an actor, in a huge theatre, entered between a pair of profile wings, or through a canvas door with no handle, into a room with a window and three chairs painted on the back cloth, and proceeded to walk right out of this primitive scene to a spot on the projecting "apron," so far forward that the occupants of the stage-boxes had a full view of his back, the thing was from the outset so absolutely unreal and conventional that no further convention could trouble or shock the audience. The greater contained the less. Having swallowed the camel, why should they strain at the gnat? He might soliloquise to his heart's content. But when a man enters a room absolutely indistinguishable in proportions, fittings and furniture from the rooms which the audience inhabit every day, the case is at once altered. Note that the removal of one wall of this room, which is often said to introduce an incurable element of unreality, in fact does nothing of the sort. Nature having omitted to provide us with eyes in the backs of our heads, we can never see more than three sides of a room at once. Therefore it does not in the slightest degree surprise or incommode us to see on the stage a room with only three sides—it is our everyday experience at any given moment. But if a gentleman enters this room, advances to the footlights, and proceeds to talk to himself, kindly expounding to himself his own character, motives and situation, our instincts at once cry

out against the absurdity—the intrusion of the conventional into the real, or, if you prefer it, the clash of two different conventions. I take up, literally at random, the first book of old plays that comes to my hand, and here is what I read:

THE PROVOK'D WIFE

Act I. Scene 1.

Sir John Brute's House. Enter Sir John, solus.

What cloying meat is love—when matrimony's the sauce to it. Two years' marriage has debauched my five senses. Everything I see, everything I hear, everything I feel, everything I smell, everything I taste—methinks has wife in't . . . . My lady is a young lady, a fine lady, a witty lady, a virtuous lady—and yet I hate her. There's but one thing on earth I loathe beyond her and that is fighting. Would my courage come up to a fourth part of my ill-nature, I'd stand buff to her relations, and thrust her out of doors. But marriage has sunk me down to such an ebb of resolution, I dare not draw my sword, though even to get rid of my wife. But here she comes.

This speech is one mass of inconsistencies, of unrealities, of things conventionally accepted in spite of nature and common sense. No real man would speak at all under the circumstances; and if we be told that the soliloquy is a mere externalisation of the thoughts passing through his mind, we must still object that a boor and ruffian like Sir John Brute would be incapable of thinking his thoughts in anything like the form here presented—of embodying them in polished phrases and jesting with his own vices. The mind of such a man is certainly inarticulate, lumpish, incapable of ironic self-analysis. Vanbrugh was in a sense imitating nature, for doubtless such drunken beasts did exist in the good old days; but he was simplifying his task by the liberal use of a whole system of conventions. No modern writer could possibly adopt such a free-and-easy method of making his protagonist introduce himself, unless it were his deliberate intention to perpetrate an extravagant farce,

which should make us laugh in virtue of its very departures from nature. This example—which, remember, is not exceptional but typical—recalls Sir Arthur Pinero's definition of comedy as understood in the manuals of literature: "A comedy is a farce by a deceased author."

It will be instructive to compare with the opening of *The Provok'd Wife* the opening of a modern play which suggests itself by reason of the fact that its first words are, in a sense, a soliloquy. The play I mean is Mr. John Galsworthy's first essay in drama:

THE SILVER BOX

Act I. Scene 1.

The curtain rises on the Barthwicks' dining-room, large, modern and well-furnished; the window-curtains drawn. Electric light is burning. On the large round dining-table is set out a tray with whisky, a syphon and a silver cigarette-box. It is past midnight.

A fumbling is heard outside the door. It is opened suddenly. Jack Barthwick seems to fall into the room. He stands holding by the door-knob, staring before him, with a beatific smile. He is in evening-dress and opera-hat, and carries in his hand a sky-blue velvet lady's reticule. His boyish face is freshly-coloured and clean-shaven. An overcoat is hanging on his arm.

Jack. Hello! I've got home all ri — (*Defiantly.*) Who says I sh'd never've opened the door without 'sistance? (*He staggers in, fumbling with the reticule. A lady's handkerchief and purse of crimson silk fall out.*) Serve her joll' well right. (*He takes a cigarette out of the silver box and puts it in his mouth.*) Never gave tha' fellow anything. (*He hunts through all his pockets and pulls a shilling out; it drops and rolls away. He looks for it.*) Beastly shilling! (*He looks again.*) Base ingratitude! Absolutely nothing. (*He laughs.*) Mus' tell him I've got absolutely nothing.

(*He lurches through the door and down a corridor, and presently returns followed by Jones, who is advanced in liquor. Jones, about thirty years of age, has hollow cheeks, black circles round his eyes, and rusty clothes. He looks as though he might be unemployed, and enters in a hang-dog manner.*)

Jack. Sh! sh! sh! Don't you make a noise whatever you do. Shu' the door, an' have a drink. (*Very solemnly.*) You helped me to open the door—I've got nothing for you. This is my house. My father's name's Barthwick; he's Member of Parliament, Liberal

Member of Parliament; I've told you that before. Have a drink. (*He pours out whisky and drinks it.*) I'm not drunk— (*Subsiding on a sofa.*) Tha's all right. Wha's your name? My name's Barthwick, so's my father's; *I'm* a Liberal, too—wha're you?

Jones. (*In a thick, sardonic voice.*) I'm a bloomin' Conservative. My name's Jones. My wife works 'ere; she's the char; she works 'ere.

Jack. Jones? (*He laughs.*) There's 'nother Jones at college with me. I'm not a Socialist myself; I'm a Liberal—there's ve-lill difference because of the principles of the Lib—Liberal Party. We're all equal before the law—tha's rot, tha's silly. (*Laughs.*) Wha' was I about to say? Give me some whisky. . . . You pour out a drink—you make yourself a good long, long drink—you take a cigarette—you take anything you like. Sh'd never have got in without you. (*Closing his eyes.*) You're a Tory—you're a Tory Socialist. I'm Liberal myself—have a drink—I'm excel'nt chap. (*His head drops back. He, smiling, falls asleep, and Jones stands looking at him.*)

Then, as most of us know, Jones, with a few mumbled words, pockets the silver box and slips away as the curtain falls.

To complete the comparison, I ought to sketch the remainder of Sir John Vanbrugh's opening scene, which I broke off at Lady Brute's entrance. There ensues a short scene between husband and wife illustrating his malignant surliness. Then Lady Brute has a long soliloquy, weighing the pros and cons of adultery, and coming to this conclusion:

> Lord, what fine notions of virtue do we women take up upon the credit of old foolish philosophers! Virtue's its own reward, virtue's this, virtue's that— Virtue's an ass and a gallant's worth forty on 't.

Then to her enters her niece, Belinda, and through five solid pages of the Mermaid edition the two women discuss, what is already perfectly clear from Lady Brute's soliloquy —namely, the imminent probability of her "crowning the game," as the phrase then went, of her lover, Constant.

Counting the words actually spoken, we find that Vanbrugh's opening scene is nearly six times as long as Mr.

Galsworthy's; yet beyond positing the abominable character of Sir John Brute it does practically nothing whatever to arouse interest or to set the action a-going. That Lady Brute should have, or should be on the point of accepting, a lover, was a foregone conclusion: it had been anticipated in at least seventy-five per cent of the comedies of the past forty years, and could not possibly awaken the slightest interest. What was the attraction, then, of this long opening scene, which must have played for close upon a quarter of an hour? Why, the polished phrasing, the artificial sprightliness of the dialogue—in other words, its departures from nature, or, more accurately, perhaps, its elaborate exaggeration of the prevailing tone of fashionable, dissolute chatter? What, now, does Mr. Galsworthy do? In just one-fifth of the time, with an economy of traits and touches suggesting the work of a great etcher, he places before us the character of an empty-headed, rackety young man, suggests the figure of a sullen, resentful loafer, ripe for crime, and, so to speak, sows the seeds of two distinct, though intertwining strains of interest—the one arising from the woman's reticule, the other from the silver box. Is it not clear that the art of the modern play is incalculably more faithful, more subtle and more highly developed than that of the late seventeenth-century comedy? There is more observation, more invention, more thought in it—a higher and more complex order of intellectual effort. And in saying this, I am not trenching at all on sentiment. I am simply comparing the craftsmanship of the two opening scenes, without giving any weight to the somewhat important, though at this point irrelevant fact, that, as the two plays develop, the one proves to be a work of exquisite humanity, the other of revolting and bestial cynicism.

What I hope to trace in my subsequent lectures is the evolutionary process of about three centuries and a quarter —from, say, 1590, to 1915. I hope to exhibit, in very brief outline, the sloughing-off from drama of the lyrical and rhetorical elements, both tragic and comic, and of the conventions associated with them, until at last we reach a

ogical and consistent art-form, capable of expressing, by neans of pure imitation, not only the social but the spiritual ife of the modern world. We shall find that the process of urification, of katharsis, involved a period, a long period, f great exhaustion, when the British drama seemed at the oint of death. It had lost the passion, the lyrical, rhetor-cal, exaggerative vigour of the past, and had not yet acquired he intellectual seriousness, the technical cunning of the uture—that future in which we are now living. The elders mong us were born into the period of inanition, and have vatched the gradual revival. But there are, as I said at he beginning, large numbers of otherwise cultured people vho have not yet awakened to the fact of this revival, and till adhere to the conviction that the drama of the present s contemptible in comparison with what they believe to be even apart from Shakespeare) the glorious drama of the ast. Whether it is possible to awaken these Rip van Winkles from their fifty-years' sleep, I do not know. But t least I hope to confirm the younger members of my audi-nce in the faith that we are not living in a period of deca-lence, but of almost miraculous renascence.

THE ELIZABETHAN LEGEND

II

Before starting on a journey, it is always well to take down the atlas, and run the eye, however hastily, over its successive stages. By this means we get things into perspective and proportion, and can tell, at any given moment, where we are and whither we are heading. I propose, then, to devote a few initial minutes to drawing a sketch-map of the route over which I hope you will be good enough to accompany me—or, in other words, to outlining the course, as I see it, of English theatrical history. In this outline I shall assert without argument views which I shall endeavour to justify later, asking you, in the meantime, to hold your own judgments in suspense. The clear enunciation of a theorem ought always to precede its proof.

What we roughly call the Elizabethan Age was undoubtedly illustrious, inasmuch as Shakespeare shed the glory of his genius upon it. But, Shakespeare apart, was it really an age of great drama? On this point there are two schools of thought. Some hold that Shakespeare was only the stateliest tree in a stately forest, others that he towered in his grandeur immeasurably above the surrounding underwoods. The former view—which regards Shakespeare simply as "primus inter pares"—"the tallest and strongest of a race of giants," says Hazlitt—has now held the field for more than a century: ever since Charles Lamb published his *Specimens*. Only here and there was a daring heretic found to question it. Swinburne, who gave us the Lamb doctrine through a megaphone, declares that Webster and Dekker "were as gulfs and estuaries of the sea which is Shakespeare,"* while of Ben Jonson he avers that "the supremacy of Shakespeare among the gods of English verse is not more unquestionable than the supremacy of Jonson among its giants."† Well now, I yield to no one in my

*Essays and Studies, p. 277.
†A study of Ben Jonson, p. 3.

love and reverence for Charles Lamb; but I think that in his Elizabethan worship he set criticism upon a wrong tack. He found the lesser Elizabethans a mine of imagination, of poetry, and therefore he assumed that they were great dramatists. As his own plays amply prove, he lacked that clear perception of the essential nature of drama which is indispensable to sound dramatic criticism; wherefore he stood sponsor to that depressing brood of unactable and mainly unreadable blank-verse plays of the nineteenth century, which trace their parentage, not so much to Shakespeare, as to the lesser Elizabethans.

Please observe that I am not contesting the extraordinary interest of the Elizabethan drama as a phenomenon in literary history. I am only questioning whether, Shakespeare apart, it includes many plays which deserve to rank among the immortal masterpieces of the world—many plays which are, or ought to be, "not of an age, but for all time." It is the product of its age—an age that was but semi-civilised. It dealt in violent passions and rough humours, suitable for audiences who were quick of apprehension and responsive in imagination, but in the main rude, incult, unpolished. The platform stage, imperfectly localised and with no pictorial background, lent itself to what may be called go-as-you-please drama, full of copious rhetoric and unchastened humour, with scarcely any art of construction or arrangement. Under such conditions, the writing of a passable play demanded little of what we should now call specifically dramatic talent. A certain fluency in dialogue was all that was required.

Then came the twenty years' stoppage of the theatres under the Puritan domination; and when the drama revived on the return of the monarchy, the semi-barbarism of an earlier generation revived with it. The manuals are in the habit of giving us to understand that the spirit of Restoration drama was imported by Charles II from France, and suggesting that its cynicism and grossness were of Gallic origin. Nothing could be further from the truth. The French comedy of the period was remarkably free from

these vices. English comedy, on the other hand, inherited them from an earlier age; and they seemed all the more offensive because society had in the meantime put on an air of outward polish. The grossness of the early seventeenth century was naif, primitive, racy; the grossness of the late seventeenth century was deliberate, cynical, corrupt. The true reproach to which our playwrights are exposed is not that they borrowed from France anything that was bad, but that they failed to borrow anything that was good. The contrast between the drama of the two countries in the Restoration period is inexpressibly humiliating. If ever there was a highly-civilised dramatist, presenting a sane, wholesome, humane criticism of life, it was Molière. Would to heaven that anyone in England had had the grace to imitate him! But he had practically no influence. Our dramatists did lip-homage, no doubt, to the notion that it was the business of comedy to scourge the vices and follies of the age; but their castigation was of the stimulant, not of the deterrent, order. They depicted vice with a liquorish gusto, folly with a savage brutality; and they practically denied the existence, in their Saturnalian world, of anything like sense or decency. Compare Molière's Alceste in *Le Misanthrope* with the foul-mouthed brute into whom Wycherley converted him in *The Plain Dealer*, and you have the measure of the difference between the French and English comedy of the period. It is in very truth Hyperion to a satyr.

It may seem that I am over-stressing the moral defects of Restoration drama and ignoring its purely artistic aspects. But this is a case in which ethics and æsthetics cannot be separated. If we assume, as I think we must, that criticism of life is an essential function of comedy—as distinct on the one hand from romance, and on the other from farce—we must admit that comedy which neglects this function, and appeals shamelessly to the baser instincts of a prurient public, is not only morally, but æsthetically debased.

A sane criticism of life began to appear in the works of Farquhar and Steele; but it was unfortunately accompanied

by a decline in sheer literary power. Perhaps it might not be quite fair to say that as soon as English comedy became decent it became dull, and that this proves indecency to have been its principle of life. The truth rather is, I take it, that the convention of cynicism was exhausted, and that no more vital convention arose to take its place. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that, as far as dramatic authorship is concerned, the whole century from about 1720 to 1820 was a dreary desert broken by a single oasis—the comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan. The almost simultaneous appearance and disappearance (so far as the stage was concerned) of these two men of genius is a curious chance for which it would perhaps be idle to demand any deeper explanation. The long moribund convention of the so-called comedy of manners flamed up like a dying candle before it went out for ever. The stage lived on acting, not on authorship. The strongest possible testimony to the genius of Garrick, John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Kean and Macready is the unspeakable dullness of many of the plays in which they somehow contrived to thrill their audiences.

About the turn of the century the stage was swept by a flood of German romanticism of the skull-and-crossbones order. Then came the period of French domination, which lasted for over fifty years. The works of Eugène Scribe, and the clever vaudevillists and melodramatists his contemporaries, afforded an inexhaustible quarry for the British playwright, whose whole stock-in-trade consisted of a French dictionary and a defective sense of literary property. My personal acquaintance with the London theatre dates from the concluding years of this predatory period. It was held to be the first qualification of a critic to know so much of the French drama as to be able to detect the unacknowledged borrowings of the British author. My first editor, James Mortimer of the *London Figaro*, had spent many years in Paris during the Second Empire, and had attended the theatre regularly. He was therefore a mine of information; and I well remember how the critics used to cluster round him on first nights, like wasps round a jargonelle,

to learn the name of the particular play that had been pillaged—and incidentally murdered—by the gentleman who would step airily before the curtain in response to the cry of "Author!" An improvement in the law of copyright, which enabled French dramatists to protect their property, did much to promote the renascence of the British Drama.

Whatever the reason, the renascence came. Its first faint flush was perceptible in the sixties in T. W. Robertson's *Society*, *Caste* and *Ours*. In the seventies the sky seemed to darken again; but the dawn was clearly perceptible in the eighties; and in the nineties, behold! the day. I am not going, at this point, to name names or to trace tendencies, but merely to express my conviction that the British drama of the present century is, for the first time since the Civil War, a creditable and even a distinguished branch of the national literature. I suggest that the apologetic, if not contemptuous, tone in which we are accustomed to speak of our living drama is an unconsidered survival from the mid-Victorian period. And, if such a view appears paradoxical, I say that it is partly because we stand too near the phenomenon to see it in its true proportions, but mainly because we do not possess that common denominator, that generally applicable standard of value, without which we can make no just comparison between the old drama and the new.

The theory suggested in my first lecture—namely, that the purification of drama by the expulsion of operatic and exaggerative elements is a mark, not of decline, but of progress—does not provide us with the standard of value of which we are here in search. It enables us to clear our minds of the prejudice which regards an archaic and impure form as inherently superior to a modern, logical and pure form; it enables us to dismiss the tacit assumption of so much that passes for dramatic criticism, to the effect that the merit of drama lies in its poetic adornments, not in its dramatic essence; but it does not enable us to reduce to a common denominator works which are cast in such different forms that they seem to defy any critical juxtaposition.

Where, then, are we to look for our criterion of specifically dramatic values?

It seems to me that a possible test is to be found in the amount of sheer intellectual power which has gone to the making of a play—I am tempted to say, the pressure of intellect to the square inch. Of course this needs qualification. If Sir Isaac Newton, or (shall we say?) Sir Francis Bacon, had written a play, no doubt a great deal of intellectual power would have been applied to the task; but, in all probability, it would have been hopelessly misapplied. We must, then, expand our formula, and say: intellectual power expressing itself in terms of the theatre—using that mechanism to the ends for which it is specifically adapted. And what are those ends? Clearly, I think, the awakening of certain emotions in a given assemblage of people, by means of the presentation of imagined actions or episodes more or less resembling the actions or episodes of real life. This, you may say, is a very cumbersome formula; but it can be sufficiently summed up in the phrase: intellectual power expressing itself in forms appropriate to the theatre.

"The theatre," however, is a term of no fixed connotation. It changes from age to age, not only in material form, but in the character, the receptivity, of its audiences. And here we come at once upon a debatable point. I wish to suggest to you that the conditions of the modern theatre and the mentality of modern audiences make drama a much more difficult and delicate art than it was in the days of our forefathers, and that consequently the production of a good play of today demands greater intellectual power than the production of a play of similar status (so to speak) in the days of Elizabeth. The dramatist of today works in a very much harder medium than that of his predecessors; and this I conceive to be to the advantage of his art. Many people, I know, take the opposite view. They look back with yearning to the fluid, go-as-you-please medium in which the Elizabethans worked, and argue that art is cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd by the technical niceties of modern dramaturgy. Their argument practically is that, since we cannot get rid

of an irreducible minimum of convention, there is no reason why we should not accept the maximum while we are about it. Only the other day I heard a distinguished novelist—none other than Mr. George Moore—maintaining fervently that the first requisite for what he called the revival of the drama was the re-establishment of the soliloquy and the aside in all their pristine liberty. That question will presently come up for discussion. For the moment, I merely mention Mr. Moore's view as an example of a tendency of thought from which I make so bold as to dissent. My contention is that the softness, the ductility, of the medium in which the Elizabethan dramatist worked, tended, not to the ennoblement, but to the cheapening of his product, and that, conversely, the stringency of modern conditions requires the application of greater mental power to the production of the average play.

You will not understand me to argue that Sir James Barrie or Mr. Bernard Shaw is a greater man than Shakespeare. Consummate genius can express itself in any form, and can ennoble any form. Nor am I arguing that the Elizabethan form may not have been peculiarly congenial to the peculiar genius of Shakespeare. But I do suggest that no small part of Shakespeare's greatness lay in the fact that he outgrew the Elizabethan form, and abused its facilities and licenses far less than even the best of his contemporaries.

You will see my point better if I enumerate some of these facilities and licenses.

The first and most obvious facility is the indeterminateness of place and time. The Elizabethan stage, as we all know, was practically a bare platform, incapable of presenting anything like a picture. The legend that changes of scene were notified by the exhibition of a placard is quite exploded.* Locality, indeed, was often indicated by the use of movable properties. If you saw a throne you knew

*At most, a placard may sometimes have announced the country or town where the action was supposed to take place—as, for instance, "Sicily," "Cyprus," "Bohemia," "Rome," "Verona," "Inverness," "Elsinore." But even for this the evidence is inconclusive.

you were at court. If a table with flagons on it, and two or three benches were placed on the stage, you were probably in, but possibly outside, a tavern. When Juliet appeared on the Upper Stage—quite probably at an actual projection in the form of a balcony—you were at no loss to conjecture (even if the dialogue had not made it clear) that she was speaking from her chamber window to Romeo in the garden below. When a bed was thrust forth (as frequently happened) or when the curtains of the Rear Stage were drawn and revealed Imogen or Desdemona in bed—the stage directions are "Enter Imogen in her bed" and "Enter Othello and Desdemona in her bed"—well, you knew you were in a bedroom. But when no visible object indicated locality, it seems clear that the Elizabethan public troubled very little about it. With scarcely an exception, all the scene-indications in the Elizabethan plays we read are inserted by modern editors. Never—absolutely never—do we find in the quartos, "Scene—Venice: A Street" or "Scene—London: A Room in the Palace." The only scene-indication that ever occurs in the stage-directions takes this form: "Enter Faustus in his Study" or "Enter Sir Thomas Moore . . . as in his Chamber in the Tower"—and even this is exceedingly rare. Often, no doubt, the dialogue suggests the scene, as when King Duncan, coming to visit Macbeth, says:

> This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.

But such indications are very far from being typical. I do not think it would be too much to say that the normal state of mind of the Elizabethan audience was one of absolute vagueness and carelessness as to the particular locality the stage was supposed to represent. They saw actors come in and declaim, or come in and cut jokes and play pranks, and troubled their heads very little as to where they were and why they had come there. Then, even when the author had, by dialogue or properties, definitely located his scene, he was of course at liberty to change it whenever, and as often

as he pleased. He was thus in great measure exempt from one of the difficulties of the modern playwright—that of plausibly getting characters on and off the stage. It may be said—and it is said—that this difficulty arises from the conventional rule, seldom broke nowadays, of "one act one scene," and that we sacrifice a reasonable freedom to the mere mechanical trouble of scene-shifting. But this is not so. Even apart from devices such as the turntable stage, the old system of alternating "front scenes" and "sets," which still obtains in melodrama, renders it perfectly simple to change the scene half-a-dozen times in an act if we think it desirable. We don't do it because we don't think it desirable. We feel, not only that the illusion is broken by jumping about from place to place, but that the dramatist is over-simplifying his task, and depriving us of the pleasure of recognising the delicate ingenuity with which he weaves the threads of his fabric so as to make each section present, so to speak, a continuous surface. The pseudo-Aristotelian "unity of place" was something quite different. It had no valid artistic reason, and was attained on the French stage only by adopting as your scene some perfectly vague locality—"A Hall in a Palace" or "A Public Place"—where anyone could meet anyone else without manifest absurdity. There is no good reason why a whole play should be tied down to one scene, though cases can be cited in modern drama in which an admirable effect of concentration is thus attained. But there is good reason why, in a play which aims at making us feel that we have lived through a real experience, a certain scenic stability and continuity should be preserved.

Time, again, the Elizabethans treated as sketchily as place. I am not referring to the practice, which Sir Philip Sidney's classical prejudices led him to ridicule, of concentrating a whole lifetime into a play. To this there is no sound objection, though the themes which demand a jump of many decades are naturally rare. I do not regard the twenty years' interval in *The Winter's Tale* as an artistic blemish. The once popular *Rip Van Winkle* was not a great work of

art; but its defect did not lie in the lapse of time absolutely necessitated by the legend. A charming and quite artistic recent play was *Milestones*, by Messrs. Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock, in which a man of twenty in the first act is a man of seventy in the last, with his grandchildren around him. The unity of time—the twenty-four hours' limit—is a perfectly irrational restriction, though again there are cases in which a fine effect of concentration is attained by observing it.

The Elizabethan over-facility in dealing with time lay not in overleaping long intervals, but in failing, so to speak, to make time coherent. A glaring instance of this is to be found in *Othello*. If we read it with the slightest attention, we see that Iago *must* be lying, since Shakespeare has left no time for any intrigue between Cassio and Desdemona. Of course, this is an inadvertence which a few strokes of the pen would have set right; but similar and much more serious inadvertences were habitual. Let me give an instance from Ford's *Love's Sacrifice*. The main plot—the amazing love-story of Fernando and Bianca—seems to occupy no more than a few days: at the outside a week or two. Yet, in the under-plot, Ferentes seduces Colona in Act I, Scene 2, and she bears a child before, in Act III, Scene 4, she appears, with two others of his victims, to assassinate him in the course of a pretended masque. Thus the minimum time for the subordinate action is fixed by nature at ten or eleven months; but if we suppose the main action to extend over anything approaching that space, it becomes, not only impossible (it is that in any case) but utterly ineffective. And instances of this kind—though perhaps a little less glaring—could be multiplied indefinitely. Dramatists seldom or never subjected their action to a consistent time-scheme; and this was an immense facilitation of their task. The modern playwright may, indeed, indulge in syncopations of time; may compress into half an hour events which would more probably have occupied twice or thrice that time. But even this is a liberty in which, if he is wise, he will but sparingly indulge. He cannot, as the Elizabethans

did, write as though time did not exist at all, or at any rate, was a matter they need not trouble their heads about.

We come now to the question of the soliloquies and asides, which Mr. Moore would fain see reinstated on the modern stage. Between the soliloquy and the aside there is a very marked distinction. They are both the externalisation of inward processes, but the one externalisation does not, while the other does, conflict with ordinary possibility and make a hopeless rift in the illusion of the scene. We all of us, when we are alone, talk to ourselves. The talk is generally inaudible; but if we choose to utter our thoughts aloud, we may; though if our friends overhear us they will probably advise us to see a doctor. Such soliloquies as Hamlet's, in any case, do not jar upon the nature of things. It may even be said that he is precisely in the state of nervous excitation in which men do actually tend to utter their thoughts aloud. But we need not drag in this realistic argument. It is sufficient that his audible utterance of reveries which, as a matter of fact, would probably be inaudible, is no outrage on possibility, and a very slight departure from probability. Gloster's opening soliloquy in *Richard III*, "Now is the winter of our discontent," etc., stands upon a somewhat different footing. This is not merely a reverie externalised: Richard is made to utter things which would not naturally pass through his mind in that form, because it is important that certain information should be conveyed to the audience. This soliloquy, in a word, is like the Euripidean prologue, a labor-saving and time-saving convention—a short-cut into the story. Richard *might* conceivably think and even say these things; but the monologue is less artistic than those of Hamlet, inasmuch as it is far less probable that he *would*. Hamlet's utterances enter fully into the psychical continuity of the character; Richard's are, partly at any rate, external to it. Thus we come upon a plain, common-sense principle; namely, that a soliloquy addressed to oneself is far less open to objection than a soliloquy addressed to the audience.

But now consider the aside. It is a reflection spoken

under circumstances which outrage possibility, forcing us to pretend to believe that the other person or persons on the stage are deaf. It also forces upon the actors a gross departure from nature: there is no natural way of speaking words which could not possibly be uttered in reality; no natural way of pretending not to hear words uttered close to one's ear. One cannot fly naturally in the face of nature. Let us take an example. I pick up, at random, an Elizabethan play—it happens to be *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, by Thomas Heywood—and I have not turned over three pages before I come upon this passage in Act II, Scene 3. Mrs. Frankford meets the villain Wendoll, and tells him that her husband, before starting on a journey, enjoined her to "do unto him (Wendoll) his most kind commends," desiring him

> To make bold in his absence, and command
> Even as himselfe were present in the house.

Wendoll answers, "I thank him for his love," and then proceeds aside:

> Give me a name, you whose infectious tongues
> Are tipt with gall and poison; as you would
> Thinke on a man that had your father slaine,
> Murder'd your children, made your wives base strumpets,
> So call me, call me so: print in my face
> The most stigmaticke title of a villaine,
> For hatching treason to so true a friend.

During all these seven lines Mrs. Frankford has to stand idly by, giving her whole mind to pretending not to hear. Then, when Wendoll has ceased speaking, she goes on:

> Sir, you are much beholding to my husband;
> You are a man most deere in his regard—

Whereupon Wendoll breaks out into another aside, twice as long as the first, at the end of which Mrs. Frankford says:

> Are you not well, sir, that you seeme thus trobled?

This is, on Heywood's part, a very rare concession to ordinary possibility: Mrs. Frankford, though deaf, is not blind, and does actually notice that there is something odd in

Wendoll's manner. Often, in Elizabethan plays, we find a whole long scene consisting more of asides than of audible speeches, each party in turn explaining to himself his private emotions or intentions, and each affecting to see nothing out of the way in the other's behaviour.* This is, of course, an immeasurable simplification of the dramatist's task—if only he can find audiences that will tolerate it. He professes to present an imitation of life; but wherever he finds it convenient, he breaks the continuity of the picture, and introduces, as it were, a fourth dimension, in which the senses can be paralysed at will, and the reason abdicates its rights. The task which reason prescribes to the dramatic artist is to exhibit character by the same means by which it manifests itself in real life; but the aside opens, as it were, a peephole into brain and heart which does not and cannot exist in nature. The soliloquy is a peephole which sometimes does actually exist and can be opened at any moment without flying in the face of possibility. The aside is a device which contradicts the whole nature of things. It is much less rational than the inscribed labels issuing from people's mouths which we see in the drawings of children and in some old-fashioned caricatures. It is, in short, a sign of sheer artistic helplessness.

In sum, then, the soliloquy and the aside contributed greatly to that softness of the medium which was, as I suggest, detrimental to the art of the Elizabethans. They enabled them to paint their picture with far less intellectual effort than is required of the modern dramatist, who uses no means of expression or explanation which do not occur in nature. The Elizabethan dramatist, in fact, called upon his audiences for an amount of make-believe from which a modern audience would recoil. And this, mark you, is not a case of appealing to the imagination instead of to the senses. It is arguable (for instance) that scenery is better left to the imagination than presented to the eye by means of paint and canvas. That contention is quite rational, even if, on the whole, we may not think it sound. But the play-

*For a post-Restoration example, see *The Constant Couple*, Act II, Sc. 2.

wright who indulges in an aside does not ask us to create absent facts, but to ignore present facts—not to body forth things unseen, but to pretend that people whom we see to be acting absurdly are acting naturally. For this there is no possible artistic justification.

We have next to consider another convention which enormously simplified the task of the Elizabethans—the convention of disguise. People do not commonly realise what an immense part disguise plays in this whole body of literature, or how it facilitates the working-up of dramatic situations of a more or less primitive type. If it be once granted that a wife has only to get into male attire to be wholly unrecognisable to her husband, it is obviously easy to build upon this convention all sorts of comic or melodramatic complications. The trouble is that the modern dramatist cannot possibly get his audience to grant anything so preposterous, unless it be in some piece of wild extravagance. Shakespeare used, or abused, disguise less than most of his fellows; but even Shakespeare now and then strains our credulity. The most notable instance is the disguise of Portia and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice;* it passes muster in an action which belongs in its other main incidents —in the device of the caskets and in the forfeit of the pound of flesh—to the realm of fairy-tale.* Viola's masquerade in *Twelfth Night* is scarcely to be reckoned a disguise, for it imposes on no one who knows her. Orlando in *As You Like It* has only once seen Rosalind in her proper shape, and so might not recognise her. We are told that her own father failed to do so; but her encounter with him takes place behind the scenes. On the whole, the Elizabethans had naturally no difficulty in conceiving that girls might pass for boys, since the performers of Rosalind, Viola, Bellario, Aspatia and all the rest actually *were* boys. Again, disguise was often facilitated, as in the case of Edgar in *King Lear*, by making the person disguised pretend madness

*In a Spanish version of *The Merchant of Venice* which I once saw in Barcelona—entitled *Sylok el Judio*—Portia and Nerissa, in the Trial Scene, appeared in black masks. But the masks only added a new element of improbability to the scene, for they could not mask their voices or their figures.

or idiocy, which enabled him, without breach of plausibility, extravagantly to distort his features. But numbers of the disguises which abound in every second play are wholly incredible, and could pass only with audiences who were prepared for the most heroic efforts of make-believe, if only the playwright produced a sufficiently startling effect. I will turn for two instances to Chapman, one of the most audacious, though not of the most habitual, practitioners of this device.

In *The Widow's Tears* (founded on the story of the Ephesian Matron) Lysander, in order to test the devotion of his wife Cynthia, causes news of his death to be conveyed to her and has a "supposed corse bestowed in the monument of his family." Cynthia, who was quite sincerely devoted to him, takes up her abode, with a handmaid, in the monument. The time supposed to elapse cannot be more than a few days, before Lysander returns, disguised as a soldier guarding the graveyard, and not only persuades Cynthia to mourn no longer, but becomes her lover in the fullest sense of the word, and sustains that relation for some time, undiscovered. Indeed, she never discovers him at all, until the plot is revealed to her by her brother-in-law, who was a party to it. That this is grotesquely impossible needs no demonstration. Yet, of this tissue of flagrant absurdities, flavoured with every possible grossness, Sir Adolphus Ward is content to say that it is "a comedy sufficiently disagreeable in subject, but not ineffective in execution"*; while Swinburne avers that "this discourteous drama is as rich in comic force as it is poor in amiable sentiment."† That the thing is a monstrous impossibility occurs to neither critic; yet what would they say if a modern dramatist were to make a husband leave home on Wednesday, return in disguise on Friday, seduce his wife without her recognising him, and live with her for an indefinite time, still unrecognised? The fact that these edifying passages take place in a tomb is neither here nor there. It is merely a characteristic Elizabethan condiment.

**English Dramatic Literature*, ii, p. 440. †*Contemporaries of Shakespeare*, p. 60.

Now let us turn to the same poet's *Bussy d'Ambois,* his most famous play,—not, observe, a production of the rude beginnings of drama, contemporary with *Tamburlaine* and *The Spanish Tragedy,* but probably composed after the death of Elizabeth, when the best work of Shakespeare was already on the stage. In this, the swashbuckler hero, Bussy d'Ambois, is the lover of Tamyra, wife of a nobleman whom Chapman calls Montsurry, history (and Dumas) Monsoreau. The lovers' go-between is a benevolent Friar. Montsurry discovers his wife's intrigue, and, in order to lure Bussy into an ambush, forces Tamyra, by first stabbing her twice and then placing her on the rack, to write a letter to Bussy in her blood, giving him an assignation. The Friar, entering and finding Tamyra under the torture, remarks, "Oh, wrack of nature,"* and incontinently dies. Then in the next scene, the Friar's ghost, described as "Umbra Friar," appears to Bussy, to warn him that mischief is afoot. He addresses Bussy in these lines:

> Note what I want, dear son, and be forewarn'd:
> Oh there are bloody deeds past and to come.
> I cannot stay; a fate doth ravish me;
> I'll meet thee in the chamber of thy love. (*Exit.*)

Bussy reflects on his warning, and says to himself:

> Note what he wants? He wants his upper weed

—in other words, the ghost appears in his underclothing, for the very good reason that Montsurry has appropriated his canonicals in order to disguise himself as the Friar. Bussy then indulges in a soliloquy of forty lines, after which a party of demons, headed by a fiend named Behemoth, appear amid thunder and lightning, to tell Bussy that

> if he obeys
> The summons that his mistress next will send him,
> Her hand shall be his death.

The fiends having taken themselves off, this stage-direction follows: "Enter Montsurry, like the Friar, with a letter writ-

*We may perhaps acquit Chapman of intending a pun, for it is not *quite* clear that the instrument of torture he had in mind was the rack.

ten in blood"—that is to say, he has put on the Friar's robe and cowl. "Hail to my worthy son!" says the false Friar; and Bussy, in spite of his two supernatural warnings, replies:

> Oh lying spirit
> To say the Friar was dead! I now believe
> Nothing of all his forged predictions.
> My kind and honoured father, well revived!

He follows the false Friar into the ambush and is, of course, killed.

Now what are we to call this, but sheer unmitigated nonsense? The supernatural apparitions are dragged in to please the groundlings, avid of diablerie. It would be idle to pretend that they have any poetic or artistically dramatic value. But, disregarding them altogether, what are we to say of the idea that Montsurry can pass himself off as the Friar by merely putting on his habiliments? Bussy, remember, is perfectly familiar with both men. Even assuming them to be of exactly the same stature, and supposing Montsurry to keep his face entirely concealed by the cowl—which could not fail to excite suspicion—what about the voice? Are we to suppose Montsurry to be so accomplished a mimic that he can disguise his own voice and perfectly assume that of the Friar? The thing, in short, is utterly impossible. Let us get away from the Court of France and state it in terms of every-day life. Suppose Sir Arthur Pinero were to write a play in which the hero, Smith, has two intimate acquaintances, Jones and Robinson: what would the critics say if Jones were to put on Robinson's ulster and motor-goggles—a much better disguise than the Friar's cowl—and were, in the character of Robinson, to carry on a long conversation with Smith, without arousing a moment's suspicion of fraud? Imagine the contempt with which such a device would be received by a modern audience! And Chapman's Smith, as we know, has been put on his guard by two emissaries from the other world!

Bussy d'Ambois, be it noted, was Chapman's most successful play, and was revived after the Restoration, when Dry-

den, it is true, perceived what dismal stuff it was. The Jacobean public evidently did not; and I say that dramatists who could produce effects with such total disregard of nature, possibility and common-sense, worked in a soft medium which dispensed them from any approach to the outlay of intellectual energy involved in the construction of a good modern play. There is no art in invention when you are at liberty to invent nonsense.

The scene of the torture of Tamyra reminds us of another advantage, or at all events facility, enjoyed by the Elizabethans: there was no limit to the horrors which they could introduce into their plays, not only with impunity, but with applause. Here, again, Shakespeare's practice shows a moderation which nobly distinguishes him from almost all his contemporaries. If we pass over *Titus Andronicus*, which he at most retouched, the blinding of Gloster in *Lear* is his one atrocity, and a comparatively mild one. For the rest, what an appalling catalogue of cruelties could be drawn up from the works of his contemporaries! I will mention only a few: the cutting out of Piero's tongue and the cold-blooded murder of the child Julio, in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge;* the torture of Rusticus and Sura in Massinger's *Roman Actor;* the triumph of the poisoned Aretus over the poisoned Valentinian in the same author's *Emperor of the East;* the appearance of Giovanni, in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, with Annabella's heart upon his dagger; the scene in which Vendice, in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, makes the Duke die in protracted torments after having kissed the poisoned skull of Vendice's murdered mistress. These are, I will not say mild, but simply characteristic specimens of the horrors upon which Elizabethan audiences supped with avidity. Nor were the sanguinary horrors the most loathsome in which they delighted. Webster and Dekker, with their dances of madmen and parades of prostitutes, seem to have ministered to a well-recognised taste.

Now there is nothing easier—nothing that demands less art, less invention, less expenditure of intellect—than to thrill people's nerves with blood and torments, if you can

only find people who like to have their nerves so thrilled. But the modern dramatist enjoys no such facility. He is sadly restricted by the queasy stomach of the modern public. The elder Dumas, in his first play, *Henri III et sa Cour*, introduced the same incident which Chapman had employed in *Bussy d'Ambois*, of making a husband force his wife to write a letter betraying her lover into an ambush; but Dumas's Duc de Guise, instead of stabbing the Duchess and putting her on the rack, merely clutched her arm with his mailed fist; and even that was held to verge upon inadmissible brutality. Sardou in *La Tosca* aroused a great outcry by making Scarpia subject Cavaradossi to torture behind the scenes, in order to wring an avowal from his mistress. Even these mild approaches to physical agony were quite as much as our nerves could endure. It is true that there is, or used to be, in Paris a theatre called "Le Grand Guignol" mainly devoted to making our flesh creep; but it had its own peculiar public, and its thrills were not commonly of the gory type.*

And now I must say one last word of what is, after all, the great facility which the Elizabethans enjoyed as compared with the moderns. It is that of expressing themselves, not in sober prose, but in the incomparably easier medium of blank-verse. Of course, I do not mean to say that great, or even good, blank-verse is easy to write; but if anyone imagines that the bulk of Elizabethan drama is written in great, or even good blank-verse, he imagines a vain thing. The quality of the verse, however, is not to the present purpose: the essential point is that the established custom of writing in verse, good, bad or indifferent, enabled and encouraged the dramatists to substitute rhetoric for human speech. It is immeasurably easier to make dramatic characters speak as men and women do *not* speak than to capture the true accent and the delicate interplay of actual talk, while at the same time condensing it, as drama must be condensed, and divesting it of its superfluities. Even in

*The success which has attended an imitation of this enterprise in London seems to me to show a deplorable perversion of taste in a certain section of the post-war public.

Shakespeare we find a good deal of sheer rhetoric; but Shakespeare possessed an inimitable art of writing beautiful and supple verse, which was at the same time very close to actual human speech. I sometimes think that one of his most unquestionable strokes of genius is that outburst of Macbeth's to the trembling messenger:

> The devil damn thee black, thou creamfaced loon,
> Where gott'st thou that goose look?

This is excellent blank-verse, but who shall deny that it is at the same time a remarkably human utterance? It is impossible to discuss at present the conditions and limitations of poetic drama—that drama which finds its natural medium in verse. What I would beg you to remark is that only a small proportion of Elizabethan drama can rightly be called poetic. The great mass of it is no more poetic than any comedy or melodrama of today, even if patches of poetry may now and then occur amid the all-pervading rhetoric. And when fashion demands that such drama be cast in verse, the author is at once relieved of any slavish adherence to nature. If he happens to write naturally, good; if not, his bombast—bombast, you know, means padding—is merely incidental to the blank-verse form. Sir Arthur Pinero, as some of you may remember, is bitterly reproached with using phrases which his critics find stilted and unnatural; and a few such phrases occurring in a play seem entirely to blind such critics to its merits, whatever they may be. Had Sir Arthur Pinero been a contemporary of Dekker and Heywood, he would have written in their measure, employed stilted phrases as a matter of course, and earned, after three centuries, the respect, if not the adoration, of critics who now despise and ignore his work. When Mr. Bernard Shaw wanted to hurry out a dramatisation of his novel *Cashel Byron's Profession*, in order to get ahead of a threatened piracy, he saved time and trouble by writing the play in blank-verse. Here is a specimen from the scene where Lydia enters, after the footman, the Admirable Bashville, has hit Cashel on the nose:

Lydia. Oh Heaven! you bleed.
Cashel. Lend me a key, or other frigid object,
That I may put it down my back, and staunch
The welling life-stream.
Lydia. (*giving him her keys.*) Oh what *have* you done?
Cashel. Flush on the boko napped your footman's left.
Lydia. I do not understand.
Cashel. True. Pardon me.
I have received a blow upon the nose
In sport from Bashville. Next ablution; else
I shall be total gules. (*He hurries out.*)
Lydia. How well he speaks!
There is a silver trumpet in his lips
That stirs me to the finger-ends. His nose
Dropt lovely colour; 'tis a perfect blood.
I would 'twere mingled with mine own!
Enter Bashville.
What now?
Bashville. Madam, the coachman can no longer wait.
The horses will take cold.
Lydia. I do beseech him
A moment's grace. Oh, mockery of wealth!
The third-class passenger unchidden rides
Whither and when he will: obsequious trams
Await him hourly: subterranean tubes
With tireless coursers whisk him through the town;
But we, the rich, are slaves to Houyhnhnms:
We wait upon their colds, and frowst all day
Indoors, if they but cough or spurn their hay.

Do not imagine for a moment that the plea of time-saving which Mr. Shaw advanced was only his fun. It is much easier to write this sort of stuff than tolerably good prose dialogue. There are reams of Elizabethan blank-verse no better than Mr. Shaw's, and much that is a great deal worse. The measure, in short, was a facility, not a difficulty. It aided the actor's memory and dispensed the poet from a nice observance of nature. It was a wand in the hand of genius, but a crutch to hobbling talent.

III

Towards the close of my previous lecture, I drew your attention to certain general characteristics of the Elizabethan Drama which, as I pointed out, relieved the dramatist of many of the difficulties which confront his successor of to-day. He could ignore time; he could shift from place to place whenever it suited his convenience; he could make his characters unpack their hearts in soliloquies, and explain in asides, at any moment, whatever was passing in their minds. He could bring about comic and even tragic situations with the utmost ease by aid of the convention which rendered the thinnest of disguises absolutely impenetrable; he could freely employ the most sanguinary horrors as vehicles of dramatic effect; and—writing habitually in blank-verse—he was able, when he pleased, to substitute artificial rhetoric for simple truth of expression. He could get on without that fine ear for the accent of ordinary speech which is the first requisite of the modern playwright.

Now it is either implicitly assumed, or explicitly contended, by a good many people, that all these liberties or licenses not only facilitated but ennobled the art of the Elizabethans, and that the modern drama, in renouncing them, has exchanged its birthright for a mess of realistic pottage. In order to test this view, I propose, in the present lecture, to examine a few noted plays of the early seventeenth century, and see how these forms of license work out in the hands of ordinary craftsmen. Shakespeare was an exception to all rules: the fact that he could get marvellous effects out of a particular form does not prove that form to be inherently and for all time admirable.

But before passing on to individual examples, I should like to point to one general consideration which seems to me significant. Though the modern acted drama has in practice rejected the Elizabethan form, there is no law

against its revival by anyone who pleases. And in fact it has been adopted during the past century by hundreds of poets and poeticules, from Shelley downwards. Every year brings forth its little crop of pseudo-Elizabethanisms. Almost every poet of note has essayed the form: Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, Sir William Watson, Mr. Bridges, Mr. Thomas Hardy, not to mention half-forgotten writers like Beddoes, Sir Henry Taylor and Westland Marston. Of all these plays, by known and unknown men, how many have the slightest vitality? Can anyone conscientiously say that he pines to see *Death's Jest-Book*, or *Strafford*, or *Chastelard* on the stage? I will confess that—apart from Mr. Hardy's *Dynasts*, a magnificent epic rather than a drama—Tennyson's *Queen Mary* seems to me, of all the Elizabethanizing products, that which has most of the breath of life in it. If Tennyson had taken to drama earlier in life, and had been at the pains of studying its laws, I believe he had in him the makings of a great playwright. Even that comparatively feeble work *Becket* had sufficient vitality to provide Sir Henry Irving with one of his most impressive characters. For the rest, the only dramatist who, in our time, has had any success with blank-verse drama was the late Stephen Phillips, who was, to begin with, a man of the theatre, and who, in the second place, made very sparing use of the Elizabethan licenses, and may rather be said to have clothed in verse of a peculiar lyrical charm plays constructed with an almost classical simplicity.

My suggestion is, then, that if some men of genius and many men of talent have failed to employ the Elizabethan licenses to good effect, it is because these seductive facilities were useful only in relation to the semi-barbarous age and stage which gave them birth. Our own more highly-developed stage demands an intensive study of its conditions, and a nice adaptation of means to ends, which the Elizabethans occasionally anticipated by chance, but which was, in the main, foreign to their conceptions. In other words, I believe that the highly technical accomplishment required of the

modern playwright is a good, and not a bad thing. He gains by working in a harder medium.

Let us now turn to some of the more famous plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries and immediate successors. It is generally conceded that, in tragic genius, John Webster stood nearest to Shakespeare, and that *The Duchess of Malfy* is his greatest play. I shall quote in due place Charles Lamb's famous eulogy: in the meantime, take this from Swinburne:

> The crowning gift of imagination, the power to make us realise that thus and not otherwise it was, that thus and not otherwise it must have been, was given—except by exceptional fits and starts—to none of the poets of their time, but only to Shakespeare and Webster. . . . Except in Æschylus, in Dante, and in Shakespeare, I, at least, know not where to seek for passages which in sheer force of tragic and noble horror . . . may be set against the subtlest, the deepest, the sublimest passages of Webster.*

Making fair allowance for the emphasis of the Swinburnian dialect, we may accept this as the orthodox estimate of nineteenth-century criticism.

Let us, then, recall to our memory the main features of Webster's masterpiece. Lest I be suspected of misrepresenting the plot, I quote the summary of it given by a twentieth-century admirer—the lamented Rupert Brooke:

> The Duchess of Malfy is a young widow forbidden by her brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal to marry again. They put a creature of theirs, Bosola, into her service as a spy. The Duchess loves and secretly marries her steward, Antonio, and has three children. Bosola ultimately discovers and reports this. Antonio and the Duchess have to fly. The Duchess is captured, imprisoned, and mentally tortured and put to death. Ferdinand goes mad. In the last act, he, the Cardinal, Antonio and Bosola are all killed with various confusions and in various horror.†

To this concisely accurate argument of the play I will only add that the butcher's bill is by no means complete. Brooke tells of only five corpses: to these we must add

**The Age of Shakespeare*, pp. 15, 32.
†*John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama*, p. 97.

the Cardinal's mistress, Julia, the Duchess's maid, Cariola, two of her children and a servant, making ten in all. The murders in *Hamlet* amount to only half that number.

The first act ushers us slowly into the theme, with a series of character-sketches of the Duchess and her two brothers, delivered by Antonio to his confidant, Delio—for the much-ridiculed confidant of French tragedy was by no means unknown to the Elizabethans. Then the "Arragonian brethren," as they are called, coarsely and brutally warn their sister, the Duchess, against marrying again. It need scarcely be said that they are taking the best possible means to make her defy their tyranny; but Webster might reply to this objection that if all men were experts in feminine psychology, the theatre might close its doors for ever. A more serious objection to their conduct is that it has no rational motive. There is not the smallest reason why they should object to their sister's making an open and honourable marriage. Towards the end of the play, this thought seems to strike Ferdinand, and he tells us that

> he had a hope,
> Had she continued widow, to have gained
> An infinite mass of treasure by her death.

But it is hard to guess how this can be, seeing that the Duchess has a surviving son by her first marriage. The fact is only once mentioned—the Duchess herself seems quite to have forgotten it—but it is at one point clearly stated, and deprives the conduct of the Duke and Cardinal of the last vestige of reason. No doubt it would not have been difficult to have conceived circumstances under which the brothers would have had a strong reason for wishing that their sister should not marry again; but Webster did not take the trouble. So long as people behaved in a sufficiently violent and sanguinary way, Elizabethan audiences did not insist on their having any particular motive for so doing.

Well, the brethren instal one Bosola, a disreputable soldier of fortune, as their spy or "intelligencer," and take themselves off. No sooner are their backs turned than the

Duchess sends for Antonio, and proposes to him a secret union, in a scene which is not without charm, though it ends on an Elizabethan note which even Lamb excluded from his specimens.

In the second act we start a cumbersome and negligible underplot, showing how the Cardinal has for his mistress the wife of a foolish old courtier of the Duchess. This serves no purpose but to provide us with another body in the last act. We presently find that the Duchess is about to give birth to a child, and that the lynx-eyed Bosola, though he suspects her condition, has no idea who is the father. We see Bosola ferreting around the Duchess's apartments at the time of her lying-in; and his suspicions are confirmed when he picks up a calculation of the child's nativity, which Antonio has casually dropped, beginning "The Duchess was delivered of a son, 'tween the hours of twelve and one in the night, *Anno Dom.* 1504." What should we say of a modern dramatist who should bring about the revelation of a deadly secret through the inconceivable folly of a leading character, who first composes a compromising document, and then drops it in the actual presence of a man whom he knows to be a spy!

Bosola now takes Antonio to be accessory to the Duchess's amour (he expresses the idea more briefly); but he is apparently incapable of putting two and two together, so does not suspect him of being the father of the child. He, of course, informs the Duke and the Cardinal of his discovery, and Ferdinand goes into an epilepsy of fury at the idea of "the royal blood of Arragon and Castile being thus attainted." He proposes to "toss" the Duchess's palace " 'bout her ears," to

> Lay her general territory as waste
> As she hath done our honours,

to "hew her to pieces," to "make a sponge of her bleeding heart," and to boil down her child into a broth and administer it to the unknown father. He is an agreeable gentleman, is Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria.

And now comes a curious and characteristic point. In spite of the foaming fury of the Arragonians, they do nothing at all to avenge their precious "honour" or to prevent further stains upon it. They stand idly by for at least a couple of years, while the Duchess, at her leisure, bears two more children to Antonio! If there exists a common-sense principle so clear and compulsive that it may fairly be called a law, it is surely that a violent passion, once kindled, ought to work itself out with a rush, and not to lapse, without reason, into a long period of torpor. What should we say if a modern dramatist presented such a broken-backed play to us? If so flagrant a fault was accepted without demur by the original audiences, it could only be because time did not exist for them, because they paid no attention either to the clock or to the calendar.

Webster, it may be said, was only following his narrative source in giving the Duchess and Antonio three children. Yes, but he was under no obligation to follow it. His business was to compress the very prolix narrative, as it appears in Paynter's *Palace of Pleasure*, into a good play. And in Paynter there is no detective set to watch the Duchess. Bosola does not appear until the very end of the story, when he is hired to murder Antonio. What is so ridiculous in Webster is the position of this paid spy of the Arragonians, who is a member of the Duchess's household for three years, and watches her producing a surreptitious family, without ever discovering who the father is. Can there be the least doubt that Webster ought to have made the brothers leave their sister unwatched until scandalous rumors reached them, that they should then have sent an agent to find out what was going on, that the agent should adroitly have penetrated the secret, and that then the catastrophe should have followed like a thunderclap? The part which Webster assigns to Bosola is a glaring example of constructive inefficiency.

At last, in the third act, Ferdinand determines to see for himself what is happening. He procures a key to the Duchess's bed-chamber, and enters by stealth. But he finds the Duchess alone; for it happens that at this very moment

Antonio is playing off a trick on her. As she is seated at her dressing-table, he says aside to her maid:

> "Pray thee, Cariola, let's steal forth the room,
> And let her talk to herself: I have divers times
> Served her the like, when she hath chafed extremely.
> I love to see her angry. Softly, Cariola."

They slip away, leaving the Duchess talking into her looking-glass; and Ferdinand, entering, overhears enough to place the fact of her amour beyond all doubt, but not to show who her lover is. Was there ever such a childish device as this of Antonio's little joke?

Finding herself discovered, the Duchess rather cleverly determines to send Antonio out of danger by pretending to dismiss him on a charge of peculation. Then Bosola, who has at last begun to suspect Antonio, by feigning to defend his character, lures the Duchess into a confession that he is her paramour.

These two scenes—the Duchess's dismissal of Antonio, and Bosola's discovery of her secret—are really dramatic, inasmuch as they show an adroit application of means to ends. And now, when at last all is out, one naturally expects the action to hurry up a little. But no such matter. Bosola, instead of trying to stop Antonio, aids and abets the Duchess in her design of following him to Ancona. It is not his fault that she does not entirely elude her brothers' vengeance. The flight to Ancona, it may be said, is part of the original story. But, once more, Webster was in no way bound to follow Paynter; and in the story there is at this point no Bosola to behave with inept inconsistency.

The lovers are re-united at Ancona, but, by the Arragonians' influence, are banished thence. Presently Bosola comes to them, bearing a letter from Ferdinand, which runs thus:

> "Send Antonio to me; I want his head in a business. I stand engaged for your husband for several debts in Naples: let not that trouble him: I had rather have his heart than his money."

The Duchess and Antonio are not to be deceived by these

"politic equivocations," as she calls them—childish would be an apter epithet—and Bosola goes off once more baffled. Then Antonio and the Duchess part, for no adequate reason. In the story a reason is provided. They see a troop of horse approaching, with the evident intention of capturing them. They cannot both escape, but the Duchess urges Antonio, who is well mounted, to ride off with their eldest son, she herself, as she believes, having nothing to fear from her brothers. This plausible ground for their separation is ignored by Webster.

We now come to the act—the fourth—which has earned for Webster the reputation of a superb tragic poet. Antonio has escaped to Milan, and the Duchess is back in Amalfi, where Ferdinand comes to visit her. Alleging that he has "rashly made a solemn vow never to see her again," he begs her to receive him in the dark. Then, affecting to "seal his peace" with her, he gives her a dead man's hand, which she at first receives as his, remarking:

> You are very cold:
> I fear you are not well after your travel.

—and then cries, "Ha! lights!—O, horrible!" Is the invention of this ghastly practical joke—for it is Webster's: he did not find it in the story—is it a thing to be admired, and to earn its inventor a place only a little below Sophocles and Shakespeare? I suggest that any morbid-minded schoolboy could have conceived it, and that the humblest melodramatist of today would not dare to affront his transpontine audiences by asking them to applaud such a grisly absurdity.

Next, the ingenious Ferdinand draws a curtain and shows the Duchess wax figures of Antonio and their son, apparently lying dead. She takes them for reality and makes no move to approach them, replacing by rhetoric the instinctive action of a loving woman, which could not have failed to discover the fraud. In any case, indeed, its success is a monstrous improbability. It would have been infinitely easier, safer and more dramatic to have lied to her in words. This waxen

lie is the device of a dramatist in search of crude physical horrors.

Now comes the famous and greatly-admired dance of madmen which Ferdinand provides to enliven his sister's last moments. It is preluded by the Duchess's beautiful speech to Cariola:

> I'll tell thee a miracle:
> I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow:
> The heaven o'er my head seems made of molten brass,
> The earth of flaming sulphur, yet I am not mad.
> I am acquainted with sad misery
> As the tanned galley-slave is with his oar.

That Webster was a poet no one denies; and yet this same poet, on the next page, treats us to the following song, sung by a madman, "to a dismal kind of music" says the stage direction:

> O, let us howl some heavy note,
> Some deadly dogged howl,
> Sounding as from the threatening throat
> Of beasts and fatal fowl!
>
> As ravens, screech-owls, bulls and bears,
> We'll bell and bawl our parts,
> Till irksome noise have cloyed your ears
> And córrosived your hearts.

When the eight madmen have gone through their frigid antics and talked their dismal nonsense, Bosola enters disguised as an Old Man, announces himself a tomb-maker come to make her tomb, and talks a great deal of fantastic stuff "fit for a charnel" as the Duchess aptly observes. Then enter "Executioners, with a coffin, cords, and a bell," who proceed to strangle, on the open stage, first the Duchess, and then the struggling, shrieking, biting and scratching Cariola. From the modern editions it would seem that they also strangle in sight of the audience the Duchess's two young children. But when we read the original quarto, in the light of our better knowledge of the structure of the Elizabethan stage, we see that the children were strangled behind the scenes and their bodies revealed by the drawing of a curtain.

Now it was of this scene in especial that Charles Lamb wrote:

> What are "Luke's iron crown," the brazen bull of Perillus, Procrustes' bed, to the waxen images which counterfeit death, to the wild masque of madmen, the tomb-maker, the bellman, the living person's dirge, the mortification by degrees! To move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to make its last forfeit: this only a Webster can do. Writers of an inferior genius may "upon horror's head horrors accumulate"; but they cannot do this. They mistake quantity for quality, they "terrify babes with painted devils," but they know not how a soul is capable of being moved; their terrors want dignity, their affrightments are without decorum.

I have already protested my love and reverence for Charles Lamb, but I cannot conceal my conviction that a more topsy-turvy criticism than this was never penned. Others, forsooth, "mistake quantity for quality"! If ever any man did so, it was surely Webster. We may be wrong in thinking his quality very poor, but there can be no mistake as to his quantity being excessive. Other people's terrors "want dignity"—is Ferdinand's trick with the dead man's hand a dignified terror? Other people's "affrightments are without decorum"—is the masque of the lunatics a decorous affrightment? Or is the strangling of two women on the open stage an incident to "touch a soul to the quick"? It seems to me body has a good deal to say in the matter. "What about Desdemona?" you may ask. Desdemona was smothered in her bed, which can be, and was on the Elizabethan stage, placed in a distant alcove. The scene is distressing enough in all conscience, but not for a moment comparable to the strangling of two women with cords, full in sight of the audience.

Lamb, you may have noted, speaks of "the living person's dirge" of which I have said nothing. He refers to the passage, soon after the entrance of the Executioners, in which Bosola suddenly breaks into rhyme, and delivers a little monody of pessimism, with the famous couplets:

> Of what is 't fools make such vain keeping?
> Sin their conception, their birth weeping,
> Their life a general mist of error,
> Their death a hideous storm of terror.

It is haunting poetry, no doubt; but it is as inappropriate, dramatically, as any aria of Donizetti. It is only one instance out of a thousand to prove that a fine poet may be a bad dramatist.

The interest of the play is over; for Antonio is admittedly a shadowy character as to whose fate we are very indifferent; and though we are willing enough to see Ferdinand, the Cardinal and Bosola punished, we could quite well dispense with that gratification. Webster, however, is not the man to leave any of his dramatis personæ alive if he can help it; so he gives us a fifth act in which five more persons are killed off, as Rupert Brooke puts it, "with various confusions and in various horrors." One of them, the Cardinal's irrelevant mistress, Julia, dies of kissing a poisoned book—a favourite incident with the Elizabethans.

The Cardinal's own death is accompanied with remarkable circumstances. His brother, the amiable Ferdinand, has gone raving mad, and the Cardinal is anxious, for reasons of his own, to keep his courtiers aloof from him. Accordingly he charges his attendant noblemen, if they should hear him "in his violent fit, to take no notice," and adds:

> It may be, to make trial of your promise,
> When he's asleep, myself will rise and feign
> Some of his mad tricks, and cry out for help,
> And feign myself in danger.

Thereupon one of the gentlemen replies:

> If your throat were cutting
> I'd not come at you, now I have protested against it.

Needless to say, when Bosola comes to kill the Cardinal, his Eminence screams for help; but the gentlemen, assembled on the Upper Stage, resolutely ignore his appeal. The scene runs thus:

Enter, above, Pescara, Malatesti, Roderigo, and Grisolan.

Malatesti. Listen!
Cardinal. My dukedom for rescue!
Roderigo. Fie upon his counterfeiting!
Malatesti. Why, 'tis not the Cardinal . . .
Roderigo. Yes, yes, 'tis he:
But I'll see him hanged ere I go down to him.
Cardinal. Here's a plot upon me! I am assaulted! I am lost,
Unless some rescue.
Grisolan. He doth this pretty well,
But it will not serve to laugh me out of mine honour.
Cardinal. The sword's at my throat!
Roderigo. You would not bawl so loud then.
Malatesti. Come, come, let's go
To bed: he told us thus much beforehand.

Could there be a more childish invention? I am haunted by the word "frigid" as I consider these masterstrokes of Webster's genius. They are coldly mechanical. There is no warmth of imagination, no glow of extravagance about them. They are the work of a man deliberately setting out, in the coldest of cold blood, to make our flesh creep.

Among the snatches of real poetry in the dialogue, I hesitate to include the much admired speech of Ferdinand:

> Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

It is not difficult to hit upon sayings which shall pass for highly dramatic simply because they are unforeseen and unlikely. I shall not, however, attempt to strike the balance between poetry and laboured rhetoric in the writing of the play: my point is that, as a work of dramatic architecture, it is about as bad as it can possibly be. The poet slavishly follows the straggling narrative of his original, where, if he knew the rudiments of his business, he ought to compress and concentrate; and where he departs from his original, it is to invent crude and arbitrary horrors which would be hooted or laughed off the stage if a melodramatist of today dared to offer them to his public.

Almost all editors of *The Duchess of Malfy* make a bald statement to the effect that Lope de Vega has treated the

same theme; but I have seen no comparison between Lope's play and Webster's. It is not one of his best-known works; but, after some trouble, I discovered it at the British Museum, and read it. A minute comparison is scarcely possible, on account of the enormous difference between the Spanish and the English conventions. *El Mayordomo de la Duquesa de Amalfi* is not so much a play as an opera, full of brilliant bravura passages. But this I say without hesitation, that Lope's catastrophe is immeasurably superior to Webster's. It is highly concentrated and, though rather too horrible for modern tastes, intensely dramatic. The Duchess and Antonio have parted, as in the original story. Then Ferdinand (here called Julio) succeeds in persuading them that he is reconciled to their union, and that Antonio has only to return to Amalfi for all to end happily. We see Antonio pass from one room into another in which he expects to meet the Duchess; and then we see the Duchess hurrying to meet Antonio; but when the curtains are drawn behind which she expects to find him, what she does find is a table set forth with three salvers, on which are the heads of Antonio and their two children. This plunge from the height of joyful expectancy to the abyss of anguish and despair is incalculably more dramatic than Webster's laborious piling-up of artificial horrors. After a pathetic outburst of lamentation, the Duchess, who has been poisoned, falls dead.

Lope's conclusion, too, is humanised by the fact that the Duke of Amalfi, the Duchess's legitimate son, whom Webster ignores, warmly espouses his mother's cause. I should be glad to know how the admirers of Webster's Duchess account for the fact that she never gives a word or a thought to the offspring of her first marriage.

I have dwelt thus long upon *The Duchess of Malfy* because it is acclaimed on every hand as the greatest non-Shakespearean tragedy of its age, and because it is at the same time a conspicuous example of the ramshackle looseness of structure and the barbarous violence of effect which characterised almost all the serious work of the period. I now

go on to review much more briefly some other famous masterpieces.

The Broken Heart, by John Ford, enjoys a reputation only second to that of *The Duchess of Malfy*. Ford's spirit was, indeed, more subtle than that of Webster. He loved the abnormal more than the merely brutal. We breathe in his writings a heavy atmosphere of morbid, sometimes monstrous, passion. His imagination has a quality of his own, but it is far from a healthy quality; and in point of constructive art he is as much to seek as any of his contemporaries.

The Broken Heart opens very languidly. Orgilus has been betrothed to Penthea, whom he loves; but the tyranny of her brother, Ithocles, prevents their marriage, and gives Penthea to the insanely jealous Bassanes. Orgilus pretends to go to Athens, but in fact remains disguised in Sparta, where the scene is laid. This disguise leads to nothing that matters, and is apparently adopted simply because the Jacobean audiences loved disguise for its own sake. Meanwhile the tyrannous brother, Ithocles, comes back victorious from the wars, and falls in love with Calantha, daughter of the king, Amyclas. Calantha has another suitor, the Prince of Argos; but he is willing to retire in favour of Ithocles; so that, down to the end of the third act, it looks as if there were going to be no tragedy at all.

But we are reckoning without Orgilus, and "the wolf of hatred snarling in his breast." He throws off his disguise and professes to be reconciled with Ithocles, who is penitent for the mischief he has done. But when Penthea, chained to her monomaniac husband, goes mad and dies, Orgilus lures Ithocles into seating himself in a chair with an "engine," or, in other words, with moveable arms which imprison him, and then murders him in his helplessness. Now Calantha is at this moment dancing at a wedding, at which the king, her father, is too ill to be present: and here occurs the most admired incident of the tragedy. I quote the passage almost entire: "Fall to our dance," says Calantha: and four couples proceed to go through what is evidently a sort of quadrille, each figure being called a "Change":

They dance the first change; during which Armostes enters.

Armostes. (*Whispers to Calantha.*) The king your father's dead.
Calantha. To the other change.
Armostes. Is 't possible?
(*They dance the second change.*)
Enter Bassanes.
Bassanes. (*Whispers to Calantha.*) O, madam!
Penthea, poor Penthea's starved.
Calantha. Beshrew thee!
Lead to the next.
Bassanes. Amazement dulls my senses.
(*They dance the third change.*)
Enter Orgilus.
Orgilus. (*Whispers to Calantha.*) Brave Ithocles
Is murdered, murdered cruelly.
Calantha. How dull this music sounds! Strike up more sprightly;
Our footings are not active like our heart,
Which treads the nimbler measure. . . .
Orgilus. I am thunderstruck.
(*The last change.*)
Calantha. So! let us breathe awhile. (*Music ceases.*)
Hath not this motion
Raised fresher colour to our cheeks?
Nearchus. Sweet princess,
A perfect purity of blood enamels
The beauty of your white.
Calantha. We all look cheerfully:
And, cousin, 'tis methinks a rare presumption
In any who prefer our lawful pleasures
Before their own sour censure, t'interrupt
The custom of this ceremony bluntly.
Nearchus. None dares, lady.
Calantha. Yes, yes. Some hollow voice delivered to me
How that the king was dead.

And so she goes on to take cognisance of the various dismal happenings, and, in her new character of Queen of Sparta, to command the execution of Orgilus. He is bled to death on the open stage; and then Calantha, at the funeral of Ithocles, dies of a broken heart.

Is there, in all this, either psychological truth or moral grandeur? Can we conceive that any woman would act as Calantha does? And, if she did, ought we to admire her for it?

Observe that there is no shadow of reason for her action. One might see something to admire in it if she were performing some great religious ceremony that must not be marred by external accidents. But she is simply dancing at a wedding. Her assumption of callousness does not even prevent an untimely interruption of the festivities; it only delays it by a few minutes. The whole thing is a piece of funereal affectation. No one is helped by it: no one is served: no decency is maintained. On the contrary, decency is outraged when a daughter goes on dancing by the bier, so to speak, of her father. The imagination which conceived the scene is warped by that bias towards the unnatural which led the author to found another play on the passion of a brother for a sister.

Yet hear what Lamb has to say:

> The expression of this transcendent scene almost bears me in imagination to Calvary and the cross; and I seem to perceive some analogy between the scenical sufferings I am here contemplating, and the real agonies of that final completion to which I dare no more than hint a reference.

Is it not time that common-sense should re-assert itself in protest against such monstrous over-valuations? They have held the field for a century—surely that is long enough.

Turn we now to Beaumont and Fletcher, from among whose plays two have been selected by common consent as masterpieces. "Judged as plays," says Mr. St. Loe Strachey, their editor in the Mermaid Series, "*The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster* stand above all else that is not Shakespeare's which can be brought for comparison in our dramatic literature."

The subject of *The Maid's Tragedy* is so difficult of discussion that I shall touch upon it very briefly. The starting-point of the action—the cruel fooling of Amintor, who marries Evadne only to be told with bitter contempt that his function is to serve as a cloak for her amour with the King—this basis of the whole play is utterly incredible. What woman in her senses, however cynical, however abandoned, would select a passionate lover to play such a trick

upon? It is simply to invite disaster; and it is a sound principle of drama that disaster too recklessly invited ceases to be interesting. History shows us how easy it is to find complaisant scapegoats for royal sins; and there is nothing to suggest that there would have been any difficulty in this case. Then the psychology of Evadne is quite obscure. She seems to despise herself from the first, and to act in desperation; but why, then, has she ever fallen to the King? She apparently feels no passion for him; and as for ambition, what glory is there in being a king's *secret* mistress? She does not appear to exercise any power through her influence over her paramour. Perhaps the radical fault of the play is that the King is a lay figure, a mere rhetorical puppet. The relation between him and Evadne might have been made interesting, but it is not. Finally, Evadne's conversion through the bullying of Melantius is psychology simplified to its uttermost. I say nothing of the brutal grossness of the play; but I do say that if a modern dramatist produced a play so full of psychological improbabilities and enigmas, he would certainly not find the critics assign him a place only a little lower than Shakespeare.

We come now to a much more pleasing theme—the romance of *Philaster*. You remember the story—how Philaster, the rightful heir to the crown of Sicily, loves and is beloved by Arethusa, daughter of the usurping king; how he places in her service his devoted page, Bellario, who is really an adoring girl in disguise; how an abandoned woman, Megra, discovered in a vulgar intrigue, takes revenge in aspersing the relations between Arethusa and Bellario; how both the King and Philaster believe her, and fly into paroxysms of fury; how Philaster actually wounds both Arethusa and Bellario, before he is convinced of their innocence; and how only at the last moment, and under threat of torture, does the supposed page clear Arethusa in the eyes of all the world by confessing her sex. This is unquestionably one of the more charming, one of the less offensive, of the Jacobean romances. There is something really attractive in the characters both of Arethusa and of Bellario, and the

writing is often beautiful. What can be lovelier than this passage, where Philaster, in his insane frenzy, threatens Bellario with death:

Philaster. Fear'st thou not death?
Can boys contemn that?
Bellario. Oh, what boy is he
Can be content to live and be a man,
That sees the best of men thus passionate,
Thus without reason?
Philaster. Oh, but thou dost not know
What 'tis to die.
Bellario. Yes, I do know, my lord:
'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep;
A quiet resting from all jealousy;
A thing we all pursue; I know, besides,
It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost.

This is the gem of the play: as beautiful a little lyric as any in the language. But for a certain infusion of the inevitable grossness, *Philaster* is a romance that would bear comparison with some of the best of the lighter pieces of Calderón.

Yet its effects are gained by a flagrant defiance both of material probability and of psychological plausibility, which would spell certain failure for any modern playwright. The disguise of Bellario carries this convention almost, though not quite, to its utmost conceivable limit. The real name of the supposed Bellario is Euphrasia. She is the daughter of Dion, a courtier, and must be known to many about the Court. Philaster has met her, and remembers her in her proper character. If Arethusa does not know her, it is a remarkable chance. At all events, her own father must know her; yet he so little recognises her in her page's dress that he, with deliberate mendacity, confirms the scandal as to the relations between Bellario and Arethusa, in order to spur Philaster into rebellion against the usurping king. At the end, it needs little less than a surgical operation to remove the scales from his eyes and enable him to recognise his daughter. Bellario takes him apart and says to him:

"Know you this face, my lord?"—"No" is his unhesitating answer. "Have you not seen it, nor the like?" she asks. "Yes, I have seen the like," he replies, "but readily I know not where"—and it takes another twenty lines or so to complete the recognition. Imagine a playwright of today building a pathetic, almost a tragic, plot on such a monstrous absurdity! To find anything analogous to it, we must go to the utmost limit of farce—to *Charley's Aunt*—and even there, if I remember rightly, the personation does not impose on anyone who knew "Charley's Aunt" in his proper habit as he lived. Need I point out again how enormously the unquestioning acceptance of this convention facilitated the task of the Elizabethan playwright?

But material impossibilities are, after all, trifling in comparison with psychological incredibilities. The whole action would, of course, fall to pieces at once if Bellario confessed her sex the moment Megra's calumny became known to her; and beyond an idle vow to "the gods," she has not the slightest reason for not doing so. Yet, in pursuance of this mere whimsy, she braves the imminent danger of death for Arethusa and herself, and the strong probability that Philaster may commit suicide, and only breaks her vow when she is threatened with torture, which will reveal her sex, whether she likes it or not. It is true that on the modern stage we too often see plays which turn upon the keeping of a promise which the one party had no right to give, or the other to exact—in short, the immoral keeping of a promise. But these plays are, by that very fact, relegated to the second or third order. Nor has Euphrasia's vow even the validity of a promise on which, however wrongfully demanded, some other person may have some shadow of right to rely. It is nothing but an expression of intention made, in effect, to herself; and her obstinate adherence to it is sheer wickedness.

Almost equally inacceptable, by any rational standard, is the conduct of Philaster. It is true that Dion, without any semblance of an adequate motive, tells him a monstrous lie, and declares that he has had ocular proof of the guilt of

Arethusa and Bellario. In accepting this statement without a moment's enquiry or cross-examination Philaster sacrifices all rational sympathy. But even apart from this inept credulity, the transparent candour of Arethusa and Bellario ought to disabuse his mind, if, instead of ranting and raving, he would give his better nature a chance of making itself heard. When he finds Bellario supporting the fainting Arethusa in the forest, this is how he carries on:

Philaster. Oh, monstrous! Tempt me not, ye gods, good gods,
Tempt not a frail man! What's he that hath a heart,
But he must ease it here!
Bellario. My lord, help, help!
The princess!
Arethusa. I am well: forbear.
Philaster. Let me love lightning, let me be embrac'd
And kissed by scorpions, or adore the eyes
Of basilisks, rather than trust the tongues
Of hell-bred women! Some good god look down,
And shrink these veins up; stick me here a stone
Lasting to ages in the memory
Of this damned act!

All this, you are to understand, is aside. He then goes on to address the women:

Hear me, you wicked ones!
You have put hills of fire into this breast,
Not to be quenched with tears; for which may guilt
Sit on your bosoms! at your meals and beds
Despair await you! What, before my face?
Poison of asps between your lips! diseases
Be your best issues! Nature make a curse
And throw it on you!
Arethusa. Dear Philaster, leave
To be enraged, and hear me.
Philaster. I have done;
Forgive my passion. Not the calméd sea,
When Æolus locks up his windy brood,
Is less disturbed than I: I'll make you know it.
Dear Arethusa, do but take this sword,
And search how temperate a heart I have;
That you and this your boy may live and reign
In lust without control.

It may be objected that I am quarrelling with Beaumont and Fletcher because their hero behaves unreasonably: whereas, if all heroes behaved reasonably, there would be an end to drama. I answer that it is all a question of degree. It is true that drama, being a reproduction of human life, must be in some measure a reproduction of human unreason. But we of the modern world find, I suggest, that when unreason passes a certain limit, it ceases to interest us; and this whole play is built up out of elements of unreason, any one of which would put it out of court—would deprive it of all claim to serious consideration—if it were presented to us as the work of a contemporary. Its historic interest, as a document in the spiritual history of our ancestors, is very great; and it contains some exquisite beauties of language. But it is only the lack of a common denominator, a generally applicable standard, which makes critics class Beaumont and Fletcher as great dramatists, while speaking with disparagement or contempt of men who practise the immeasurably more difficult art of depicting modern life under the conditions of the modern stage.

Philaster, be it noted, is beyond question one of the more civilised, if I may so express it, of non-Shakespearean plays. Let us now turn to one of the twin masterpieces of Cyril Tourneur, or Turner, and see what we can make of it. Tourneur, as we know, ranks very high in the esteem of orthodox criticism. Swinburne places him "higher than Ford," and declares that he "recalls the passion and perfection, the fervour and the splendour and the harmony which we . . . recognise in the dialogue or the declamation of Æschylus himself."* Let us sample this British Æschylus, in his second play, *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

The task is not easy, for the man, having a hideous mind, dealt in hideous themes, and revelled in hideous language. The play opens with an address by the hero, Vendice, to the skull of his mistress, who has been poisoned by the wicked Duke of an unnamed Italian city. The Duke's family rela-

*Contemporaries of Shakespeare, pp. 169, 177.

tions are somewhat complicated. He has a son by his first wife, Lussurioso by name. He has a bastard son, Spuric. He has married a second wife, who has three sons by her first marriage, Ambitioso, Supervacuo, and an unnamed Youngest Son. We make acquaintance with this amiable family at the trial of the Youngest Son for rape. His victim, who has poisoned herself, was the virtuous wife of an old courtier, Antonio. As the Duke declines to set the criminal free, the Duchess determines to avenge herself by taking for her lover her bastard stepson, Spurio, a foul-mouthed ruffian. The Duke's own son, Lussurioso, learning of the intrigue, tries to kill the Duchess and her paramour, but, through some unexplained mistake, finds the Duke himself in the bed in which he expected to find Spurio, and is accused of having attempted his father's life, and sent to prison. The Duchess's elder sons, Ambitioso and Supervacuo, under colour of pleading for their step-brother's life, extract from the Duke an order for his immediate trial, which they convert into an order for his immediate execution; but the prison governor, to whom they deliver it, thinks it refers to their own brother, the Youngest Son, and beheads him instead of Lussurioso.

Following up this little train of domestic incidents, we have lost sight of the hero, Vendice. That worthy, disguising himself and assuming the name of Piato, enters the service of the before-mentioned Lussurioso, the Duke's son, in the capacity of pander. The first task assigned to him is to undermine the virtue of his own sister, Castiza. In this he fails; but in a long scene of crude cynicism he bribes his mother to corrupt her daughter. (Needless to say, neither the mother nor the sister recognises Vendice under the disguise of Piato.) I should like to quote from this dialogue, but it is really impossible to find ten consecutive lines that are quotable. The scene, somewhat expurgated, may be read in Lamb's *Specimens;* as also the later scenes in which Vendice and his brother, Hippolito, threaten to kill their mother, and in which Castiza affects willingness to become Lussurioso's mistress.

But the debates in this high-minded family are mere idyllic interludes. We touch the summit of Tourneur's conception of tragedy in the fourth scene of the third act. The old Duke has requested Vendice to procure him a midnight assignation with a lady, at an "unsunned lodge" in his park, where, by a happy coincidence, the Duchess and Spurio, as Vendice knows, have given each other a rendezvous. Vĕndice and Hippolito are early on the spot, Vendice bearing, as the stage-direction puts it, "the skull of his love drest up in tires." This is the lady he has brought to meet the Duke. "Now to my tragic business," he says:

> Look you, brother,
> I have not fashioned this only for show
> And useless property; no, it shall bear a part
> E'en in its own revenge. This very skull
> Whose mistress the Duke poisoned, with this drug,
> The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged
> In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death.
> As much as the dumb thing can, he shall feel:
> What fails in poison, we'll supply in steel.

With these words he rubs poison on the teeth of the skull. When the Duke arrives, the brothers apparently burn some aromatic gum that gives forth what the Duke calls "a perfumed mist"; and in it they give him the skull to kiss. Then ensues a dialogue which I shall venture to quote with large expurgations:

Duke. O, what's this? O!
Vendice. Royal villain! white devil!
Duke. O!
Vendice. Brother, place the torch here, that his affrighted eyeballs
May start into those hollows. Duke, dost know
Yon dreadful vizard? View it well; 'tis the skull
Of Gloriana, whom thou poisoned'st last.
Duke. O! 't has poisoned me.
Vendice. Did'st not know that till now?
Duke. What are you two?
Vendice. Villains all three! the very ragged bone
Has been sufficiently avenged.
Duke. O, Hippolito, call treason!

Hippolito. Yes, my lord: Treason! treason! treason!
(*Stamps on him.*)
Duke. Then I'm betrayed. . . . My teeth are eaten out.
Vendice. Had'st any left?
Hippolito. I think but few.
Vendice. Then those that did eat are eaten.
Duke. O my tongue!
Vendice. Your tongue? 'twill teach you to kiss closer,
Not like a slobbering Dutchman.

They then tell him in the coarsest language of the intrigue between his bastard son and his wife: "Here in this lodge," says Vendice:

They meet for damnéd clips.
Those eyes shall see the incest of their lips.
. . . . Hark, the music:
Their banquet is prepared, they're coming—
Duke. O, kill me not with that sight!
Vendice. Thou shalt not lose that sight for all thy dukedom.
Duke. Traitors! Murderers!
Vendice. What! is not thy tongue eaten out yet?
Then we'll invent a silence. Brother, stifle the torch.
Duke. Treason! Murder!
Vendice. Nay, faith, we'll have you hushed. Now with your dagger
Nail down his tongue, and mine shall keep possession
About his heart; if he but gasp, he dies.
We dread not death to quittance injuries.
Brother, if he but wink, not brooking the foul object,
Let our two other hands tear up his lids,
And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood;
When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good.

The Duchess and Spurio then cross the stage, revealing their guilt in gross and cynical terms; and, at sight of them, the Duke gives up the ghost in agony.

I wonder what Æschylus would have thought of this scene. To me it seems the work of a sanguinary maniac, who cannot even write tolerable verse.

Tourneur, however, had a sort of crazy ingenuity in working up horrors. Hippolito introduces Vendice in his own person to Lussurioso, who commissions him to kill Piato—that is to say, himself in disguise. Thereupon Vendice and

Hippolito put the Piato disguise on the body of the murdered Duke, and start the theory (which is accepted) that Piato has murdered him, dressed up the corpse, and absconded. Lussurioso now succeeds to the dukedom and celebrates his accession by a banquet. Vendice, Hippolito, and two unnamed lords enter in masquing habits and, after a dance, kill Lussurioso and his guests. Then the step-brothers, Ambitioso, Supervacuo and Spurio, enter, also under the guise of a masque, intending to murder Lussurioso, but, finding the deed already done, they kill each other instead. At last, none of the happy family being left alive, Antonio, the husband of the lady who was outraged at the beginning of the play, succeeds to the dukedom; and his first act is to order Vendice and Hippolito off to instant execution. The Duchess, oddly enough, is banished, not killed. Tourneur perhaps thought that, in the matter of bloodshed, enough was as good as a feast—on the principle of the man who, having eaten twelve dozen oysters, declined to eat a thirteenth dozen, on the ground that he was not going to make a beast of himself.

Setting aside sexual crimes, actual and attempted, we have in this play from fifteen to eighteen murders and executions. The casualty-list cannot be quite accurately made up, for there are various unnamed "Lords" in the last act, and it is not clear how many of them are killed. All we know is that the stage is a shambles.

I will not harp on the amazing parallel between Tourneur and Æschylus. I will only ask whether such monstrous melodrama as *The Revenger's Tragedy*, with its hideous sexuality and its raging lust for blood, can be said to belong to civilised literature at all? I say it is a product either of sheer barbarism, or of some pitiable psychopathic perversion. I say it is ludicrous to find critics solemnly æstheticising in this slaughter-house, and pronouncing, on the strength of this and other masterpieces, that "the silver age of English drama would eclipse the golden age of dramatic poetry in any other nation of modern times."* I say we can-

*Swinburne: *Contemporaries of Shakespeare*, p. 172.

not too soon clear our minds of this cant, which is usually accompanied by ignorant contempt for the modern drama. Tourneur had few even of those flashes of poetry which light up the works of most of his contemporaries. His verse is ragged and halting, and he is prodigal of rhyming tags of the utmost banality. One of them is famous: it occurs where Vendice, apostrophising his mistress's skull, says:

> Methinks this mouth should make a swearer tremble,
> A drunkard clasp his teeth, and not undo 'em,
> To suffer wet damnation to run through 'em.

This, though a most praiseworthy sentiment, is hardly a jewel of poetry. Not the least nauseous feature of Tourneur's work—and he shares it with many of his contemporaries—is the pose of indignant morality under which he tries to dissemble his gloating appetite for horrors. Lamb did not fail to remark this pose, though not, apparently, in the case of Tourneur. He says, of a speech of Dekker's Bellafront:*

> This simple picture of Honour and Shame, contrasted without violence, and expressed without immodesty, is worth all the *strong lines* against the Harlot's Profession, with which both parts of this play are offensively crowded. A Satirist is always to be suspected who, to make vice odious, dwells upon all its acts and minutest circumstances with a sort of relish and retrospective gusto.

If only Lamb had always shown such sanity in his treatment of all the Elizabethans, our love for him could not, indeed, have been greater, but our gratitude would have been more unmixed.

In my next lecture I shall examine some other typical plays of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and especially one or two comedies. My attempt today has been to show that some of the most admired masterpieces of the period exist in virtue of licenses both of manner and of matter which are absolutely denied to the playwright of today, and would damn any work in which he indulged in them. I have tried to show that the construction of Webster's

*The Honest Whore, Act IV, Sc. 1.

Duchess of Malfy is hopelessly loose, shambling and maladroit, and that the horrors which he is supposed to "touch" so "skilfully" are frigid and mechanical inventions, within the range of the humblest capacity. I have tried to show that there is neither truth to nature nor even any striking dramatic effect in the affected and purposeless stoicism of Calantha in Ford's *Broken Heart.* I have tried to show that *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster* are full of psychological obscurities, inconsistencies and improbabilities, which a dramatist of today would place before his public only at his utmost peril. I have tried to show that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is a mere farrago of sanguinary absurdities, which might have been amusing had it been presented as a burlesque of the prevailing style of tragedy. One cannot, indeed, quite repress a suspicion that Tourneur wrote it with his tongue in his cheek, and would have been amazed and amused to think of Vendice being taken seriously by a whole school of critics after three centuries.

Though details in my animadversions may be thought mistaken or excessive, I cannot see how it is possible to doubt that the standards commonly applied to Elizabethan work are wholly different from, and very much laxer than, the standards applied to modern drama. To put it proverbially, the Elizabethan may steal the horse where the modern dramatist may not look over the hedge.

No one pretends, of course, that modern playwrights are, as a rule, poets in the sense in which most of the Elizabethans, even apart from Shakespeare, could claim that title. As Swinburne rather prettily says: "It would seem that the very existence and presence of Shakespeare on English earth must have infected with a celestial contagion of incomparable style the very lowliest of his followers in art and his fellows in aspiration."* But we, having adopted a stricter ideal of drama,—having differentiated it more completely from the epic, the romance, the opera, not to mention the pamphlet and the comic paper—are, or ought to be, able to perceive that poetic merits are apt to be dramatic faults.

*Contemporaries of Shakespeare, p. 215.

I say ought to be; because critics brought up on the Elizabethan tradition commonly are not. Finding no poetry of the conventional type in modern plays, and having no eyes to perceive their specifically dramatic qualities, they either ignore them, or speak of them slightingly as merely trivial productions. It is that fallacy against which I venture to warn you.

The comparison is, of course, complicated by the existence of Shakespeare, who had, at his best, an absolutely unique gift for blending poetic beauty with dramatic intensity. Take, for instance, the last speech of Othello:

> I pray you in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down ought in malice: then must you speak
> Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
> Perplex'd in the extreme; of one, whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away,
> Richer than all his tribe; of one, whose subdu'd eyes,
> Albeit unusèd to the melting mood,
> Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian, and traduc'd the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him—thus.

Here we have a piece of exquisite music combined with a consummate, a masterly dramatic invention. But you may search the lesser Elizabethans in vain to parallel it. Or will anyone bring into the comparison poor Webster's

> Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young?

IV

I attempted, in my last lecture, a somewhat detailed analysis of five of the Elizabethan plays which have been most enthusiastically—in my view most excessively—praised by the nineteenth-century school of critics. Time forbids any attempt to subject a large number of plays to such leisurely examination. In this lecture, then, I shall try to sum up the characteristics of five of the leading playwrights of the period, glancing briefly at some of their principal works. I shall entirely pass over those whom we may call the primitives—Marlowe, Kyd, Greene, Peele and Lodge—and take notice only of writers who came to the front after the purely tentative period was past, and the formula of the age had fairly established itself. In doing so I intend no disrespect to that master of the "mighty line," Christopher Marlowe. He was a great poet, and might, had he lived, have grown into a great dramatist. But it is evident that in his work the differentiation between epic and drama is as yet imperfectly accomplished. The one form is growing out of the other, as we see a half-finished statue emerging from the rough-hewn block of stone.

The general bent of my considerations you doubtless anticipate. I shall try to show that the plays of the writers selected —Jonson, Chapman, Marston, Middleton and Massinger— though they abound in poetic beauties, and contain passages of very considerable dramatic strength, are constructed with the laxity encouraged by a stage on which verisimilitude of time, place and circumstance was almost unattainable, and are conditioned by the necessity of appealing to audiences who demanded violence in tragedy and crudity in comedy —who loved above everything a rhetorical rant on the one hand, and on the other a ribald jest.

The element of crudity it is, of course, difficult to illustrate, but the fact of its existence is too manifest to call for

proof. The matter is squarely faced by the latest Elizabethaniser, Rupert Brooke, who protests against "the impudent attempt to thrust the filthy and degraded standards of the modern middle-class drawing-room on the clean fineness of the Elizabethans," and goes on to declare that "the Elizabethans liked obscenity; and the primness and wickedness that do not like it have no business with them."* I am afraid that I must confess to the prim wickedness of disliking a bad smell and preferring to turn aside from the sour foulness of a fermenting ash-heap. The question is not one of morality or immorality, but of sweet air as opposed to stifling malodorousness. I suggest that it was not a merit, but an unpleasing defect, in the Elizabethans that they loved to hale into the foreground of their pictures all the unsavoury incidents of life which modern sanitation tries to hold aloof, not only from our eyes, but from our nostrils. The plain truth is that the London of the spacious times was a hideously insanitary city, and that the stenches of its streets and alleys freely invaded the playhouse, and still linger in its literature. With all respect for a brilliant talent, too early lost to us, I venture to believe that if Rupert Brooke had outgrown the confusions of his youth, he would have recognised that it is no mere drawing-room convention which declares filth to be filthy, in all ages and places, and filth in the wrong place to be not only nauseous but noxious. To talk of the "clean fineness" of the Elizabethans is not merely paradox—it is cant.

Of course, I am not blaming the Elizabethans for living in an uncivilised and unsanitated age: I am only saying that it was, even artistically, their misfortune and not their merit. But as compared with his successor of today, the Elizabethan comedy-writer enjoyed an undoubted facility in being able to raise laughter from allusions to topics at which we moderns do not laugh, but shudder—for example, offensive breath, decaying teeth, premature baldness, cutaneous and venereal disease, physical afflictions of all sorts. Nor were mental afflictions considered otherwise than as fair game.

**John Webster*, pp. 85, 86.

The cruel barbarism of the age may be sufficiently estimated from the single fact that Bedlam was a popular place of amusement for smart society, like Hurlingham or Sandown Park today. Lady Haughty in Jonson's *Silent Woman* tells Epicoene that she must make her husband allow her a coach-and-four to "go with us to Bedlam, to the china houses and to the Exchange"; and again in *The Alchemist* we are told that Dame Pliant will have a coach-and-eight

> To hurry her through London, to the Exchange,
> Bethlem, the china houses.

Could there be a more significant trait of manners?

It is of Jonson that I now propose to speak—and first of *Every Man in His Humour*.

It would be absurd to deny all merit to a play which held the stage, off and on, for more than two centuries; in which such actors as Garrick and George Frederick Cooke found one of their most popular parts; and in which, so recently as 1845, an amateur company directed by Charles Dickens appeared with some success. A play with such a history must unquestionably offer playable parts: and it is easy to perceive that this is the case. Kitely, the jealous husband; Bobadill, the braggart soldier; Master Stephen, the rustic nincompoop; Master Matthew, the would-be rhymester who steals his rhymes; Downright, the surly squire; even Cob, the comic water-carrier; are personages out of which skilful comedians can doubtless extract a good deal of effect. They are all broad caricatures; but to audiences in a certain stage of culture—a stage of culture which is to this day largely represented in the lower-class theatres, the music-halls and the picture-palaces—character is unrecognisable unless it be violently overdrawn. Of course we have drolls of the same type scattered through Shakespeare—some of them delightful, such as Aguecheek and Slender, some of them decidedly tedious, such as Bardolph and Nym—but he never peopled a whole play with them. If we want to understand the difference between caricature and genuine comic

character, we have only to compare Jonson's Kitely with Shakespeare's Ford. The one is an outrageous attitude, the other is a living, self-torturing man.

Then we have in *Every Man in His Humour* the adroit, audacious valet, Brainworm, expert—quite miraculously expert—in disguises, a descendant of the roguish slave of Latin comedy. We have also the burly, humorous Justice Clement, as nearly a conceivable human being as any of them. But, for the rest, the personages who are not caricatures—Old and Young Knowell, Wellbred and Cash—are little better than lay figures. And the women are negligible shadows.

The merit of the play, then, lies in its vigorously-drawn, playable caricatures. But by no reasonable canon of art can a mere array of caricatures be said to constitute a good comedy. One other ingredient at least is essential—a clear, more or less ingenious and entertaining, story. Nothing of the sort is to be found in *Every Man in his Humour*. I defy anyone to relate comprehensibly or to make credible the wholly uninspired and uningenious comings and goings and to-ings and fro-ings of which the story consists. The machinations of Brainworm supply its motive force; and, except as vehicles for virtuosity in acting, they are devoid of interest or plausibility. A worse-constructed play could not easily be discovered, outside of Jonson's works. What a masterpiece is *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in comparison with it! Yet how unquestionably one of Shakespeare's poorest plays! Or compare it with *She Stoops to Conquer* or *The School for Scandal!* These are delightful inventions; the mere stories, the situations, enrich our memories. Who ever could, or ever wanted to, recall the story of *Every Man in his Humour?*

I have said that it would be difficult to find worse-constructed plays outside of Jonson's works: within the boards of his folio it is, unfortunately, only too easy. *Every Man out of his Humour* and *Cynthia's Revels* are, I take it, the very worst plays ever produced by a man of talent. They are mere galleries of oddities and grotesques, with no more

action than there is in Madame Tussaud's or in a fashion-plate. Even Jonson-worshippers admit them to be failures. Swinburne calls them "undramatic, if not inartistic, satires in dialogue."* Sir Adolphus Ward defends *Every Man out of his Humour* against the strictures of Schlegel, but admits that in *Cynthia's Revels* "the plot, such as it is, lies buried beneath the characters, while the characters are buried beneath the dialogue."† To me it appears that this condemnation applies almost equally to the earlier play, and that they are both such laborious, shapeless, lumbering failures as would have been impossible to any man with the true instinct of the theatre in him. They put us on the track of what I take to be the truth—namely, that Jonson was a man of vigorous mind who wrote plays because everyone else did, not because he had an innate bent towards drama.

When we approach his three most famous works, *Volpone, The Silent Woman* and *The Alchemist*, we come upon one dominant characteristic of Elizabethan comedy which at once assigns it to a low stage in dramatic development. An enormous percentage of plays of the lighter sort deal with sheer rascality, usually assuming the form of imposture, or, as it was called in the language of the day, cozenage or coney-catching. This characteristic hangs together with the fondness for disguise, and the readiness to believe in miraculously perfect transmogrifications. I might have enumerated "cozenage" along with "disguise," in my second lecture, as one of the conventional facilities enjoyed by the Elizabethan playwright, and denied to the playwright of today, except in farce and the lower sort of melodrama. It is evidently very easy to concoct some sort of a plot, if you start from an assumption of pure scoundrelism on one side and illimitable credulity on the other. But credulity in the characters, if carried beyond a reasonable pitch, demands a corresponding credulity in the audience. Elizabethan audiences, it would seem, were ungrudging in their response to this demand. They were childishly ready for any amount

*Ben Jonson, p. 15.
†English Dramatic Literature, ii, 349, 354.

of make-believe. Modern audiences are more sophisticated. They find greater difficulty in hushing the still small voice of common-sense. They have, in a word, come to years of discretion.

Volpone is, without doubt, the greatest of Jonson's works. It is a stupendous piece of Swiftian misanthropy. Its leading characters are all monsters of cruelty, or of cupidity, or of folly—and in some cases of all three put together. Several of the scenes are written, not with dramatic suppleness, elasticity, verve, like the great scenes in Shakespeare, but with extraordinary logical and rhetorical power. Jonson had a faculty of what may be called tense volubility, well-nourished both with imagination and learning, which often reminds us of Robert Browning—the Browning of *Bishop Blougram's Apology, Sludge the Medium* and *The Ring and the Book.* But when we take the thing as a whole, and examine it from the point of view of sanity and plausibility, we find it false in its foundations and incredible in its developments—acceptable only to an audience so avid of cynicism as not to care greatly how it is served up.

Without attempting a full analysis of the play, I must try to justify what I have said as to the falsity of its initial assumptions. We are asked to believe that Volpone has grown enormously rich simply by pretending to be at death's door and extracting magnificent presents from people who hope to inherit his wealth. He explicitly disclaims all other sources of profit. "I glory," he says:

> More in the cunning purchase of my wealth,
> Than in the glad possession, since I gain
> No common way; I use no trade, no venture;
> I wound no earth with ploughshares, fat no beasts
> To feed the shambles; have no mills for iron,
> Oil, corn, or men, to grind them into powder:
> I blow no subtle glass, expose no ships
> To threatenings of the furrow-faced sea;
> I turn no monies in the public bank,
> No usurer private.

Nor is he a miser: he prodigally indulges his vices, or, as

he puts it, "cockers up his genius"; while the opinion of his wealth and infirmity, as he says:

> Draws new clients daily to my house,
> Women and men of every sex and age,
> That bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels,
> With hope that when I die (which they expect
> Each greedy minute) it shall then return
> Tenfold upon them; whilst some, covetous
> Above the rest, seek to engross me whole,
> And counterwork the one unto the other,
> Contend in gifts, as they would seem in love.

Now these pre-suppositions, if they do not exaggerate human cupidity (which would perhaps be difficult), enormously exaggerate human folly. For cupidity goes with parsimony. People who seek to ingratiate themselves with wealthy relatives do not make presents of massy plate, like Voltore, or of unique jewels, like Corvino, or of "bags of bright chequines," like Corbaccio. They seek to buy favour cheap, and make but trumpery bids for gratitude. Who ever heard of avarice staking large sums on a problematical post-obit? Mr. Pecksniff will intrigue to get old Martin Chuzzlewit into his house, and will expend upon him flattery and servility without stint; but cash and jewels—no!* Besides, he will expect certain modest pickings on account—and these it is clear that Volpone never distributed. Men of reputed wealth have doubtless lived more or less comfortably for years on their relatives' "lively sense of favours to come"; but they have never coined it to the tune of millions and lived riotously upon it. The case of Volpone, in short, does not exist in nature. It is a figment of crude cynicism.

And the same description applies to almost every development of the fable. The gulls are preternaturally gullible. There is, indeed, some real ingenuity in the rogueries of Mosca; but he is working in too soft a medium. There is no art in leading people by the nose when they thrust their nose-rings into your hand. Nor is the train of events through

*Compare with the situation set forth in *Volpone* the reading of the will in Bulwer's *Money*. Bulwer was not a scrupulous realist, but his characters are human and credible, when contrasted with Jonson's.

which Volpone's villainies defeat themselves devised with any skill. Mosca's alleged reason for bringing Corbaccio's son to Volpone's house, where he ruins the plot against Celia, is a piece of quite incredibly complicated wickedness; not to mention the fact that it is only explained in retrospect, and leaves us utterly bewildered while the events are in progress. The whole structure, in short, while it shows a certain largeness and intensity of conception, is loose, ill-jointed, haphazard—adapted for presentation to easy-going audiences, who did not dream of insisting on either physical or psychological verisimilitude.

The English characters, Sir Politick and Lady Would-be, are spirited caricatures in themselves, but are in every sense foreign bodies in the fabric of the play; and the scene in which Sir Politick tries to hide in a tortoise-shell is a piece of outrageous and puerile farce. Of Volpone's household pets, Nano, Castrone and Androgyno, I say nothing—even Swinburne cannot stomach them.

A curious incident of some thirty years ago brings *Volpone* into modern theatrical history. Emile Zola somehow came across it, and it appealed to the crudity of his taste. He made an adaptation of it, called *Les Héritiers Rabourdin,* which was produced, and failed with a resounding crash. Then, in the early days of the Independent Theatre, Mr. J. T. Grein produced a translation of Zola's play, with an exactly similar result. A more lugubrious failure I never witnessed. An adaptation, of course, does not absolutely prove anything; but I think the fate of Zola's play raised a fairly strong presumption that modern audiences have outgrown the cruelty and brutality of Jonson's outlook upon life. In other words, his methods are methods of barbarism.

The Silent Woman is a robust and boisterous farce, said to have been the most popular of all Jonson's works, and showing, perhaps, more specifically dramatic invention than any other. Its main theme is a practical joke, with a number of subsidiary practical jokes growing out of it. Jonson shows himself untroubled by a technical problem which has agitated recent dramatic theorists—namely, whether it is

ever safe to keep a secret from the audience. Unless it be in the name "*Epicœne*," he gives no hint until the very end that the "silent woman," whom the noise-hating misanthrope, Morose, has been tricked into marrying, is in fact a boy. As a matter of abstract theory this is indubitably wrong. Half the fun of the thing is lost upon us if we, like Morose, take Epicœne for a woman. For instance, the scene in which Sir John Dawe and Sir Amorous La Foole are egged on to boast of having enjoyed her favours is pointless until we know the truth. But the success of the play shows that the theoretic question is of small practical importance, since, after the first performance, such a secret can never be really kept. It is quite certain that the greater number of every subsequent audience, if they knew nothing else about the play, would know that Epicœne was not what she seemed. Thus if Jonson valued himself on keeping his secret, he was doubly wrong: he was wrong in thinking it a judicious thing to do, and he was wrong in holding it practically possible. On the other hand, the best scene in the play—the Rabelaisian passage in which Truewit, with relentless volubility, dins the perils of matrimony into Morose's tortured ears—would certainly gain in point if we knew that in so doing he ran the risk of marring the deep-laid plot of the very friend in whose interest he believes himself to be acting. The Elizabethan carelessness of probability outruns even the limits of farcical extravagance in the final scene, in which the barber and the innkeeper, disguised as a doctor of divinity and a canon lawyer, discuss the possible grounds of divorce, and both show a very passable command of the Latin terminology of the subject. What it meant to the groundlings it is hard to guess. We must conjecture that the actors carried on the dispute with great comic vehemence, and that the audience accepted the Latin as amusing gibberish.

The Alchemist is the comedy of cozenage carried to its highest power, a carnival of rampant rascality on the one hand and grotesque gullibility on the other. Here again the action depends upon utter vagueness of place and time

and upon the free use of impenetrable disguises. It eludes criticism by dint of its luxuriant audacity. Unquestionably a good deal of sheer brain-power has gone to the composition of the play. "The judgment is perfectly overwhelmed," says Charles Lamb, "by the torrent of images, words and book-knowledge with which [Sir Epicure] Mammon confounds and stuns his incredulous hearer." Here again, as in *Volpone,* we are reminded of Browning. But we feel that we are in contact with a powerful mind, not subduing itself to any rational artistic conditions, but simply "abounding in its own sense," and enabled to do so by the extreme pliability of the medium in which it worked. The unrelieved ugliness and sordidness, the moral squalor of the whole picture, belong to an age which is only laboriously struggling towards civilisation. It is hard to believe that *The Alchemist* and *Tartufe* fall within the limits of the same century.

There is undoubted dignity and strength in *Sejanus,* Jonson's transcript from Tacitus and Suetonius. Relieved of some of its verbosity, it might even produce a certain effect on the modern stage. But compared with *Julius Cæsar* or *Antony and Cleopatra,* how stiff, how cumbrous, how elephantine it seems! We all know how Fuller compared Jonson to a great Spanish galleon and Shakespeare to an English man-of-war. But I think the past years have provided us with a still better image for Jonson. He reminds me irresistibly of a tank: a huge and cumbrous engine, crashing by its sheer weight through the complex hindrances offered by ill-digested learning, inordinate self-esteem and a rhetorical rather than a truly dramatic temperament. He is a ferocious satirist, a considerable, almost a great, poet, and a dramatist, not by innate vocation, but by external necessity.

The truth about Jonson is beginning to leak out. In reviewing, some time ago (November thirteenth, 1919), Mr. Gregory Smith's *Ben Jonson* in the "English Men of Letters" series, the *Times Literary Supplement* said:

> The reputation of Jonson has been of the most deadly kind that can be compelled upon the memory of a great poet. To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all

desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries—this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval. For some generations the reputation of Jonson has been carried rather as a liability than as an asset in the balance-sheet of English literature. No critic has succeeded in making him appear pleasurable or even interesting.

Interesting he is, as a historical phenomenon, just as the Pyramids and the Tower of London are interesting. But the reason why no criticism can make him appear "pleasurable" is only too clear—namely that he laboured ponderously in a dead convention.

Not very different must be our summing-up of George Chapman: less of a satirist than Jonson, more of a poet, and, like him, writing dramas, not because he was a dramatist born, but because they were the most remunerative form of literature. His most successful play was *Bussy d'Ambois*, a melodrama of lust, cruelty and murder, seasoned not only with the obligatory ghost, but with a troop of demons, under the command of two of Satan's brigadiers, Behemoth and Cartophylax. I have already cited Montsurry's personation of the dead Friar as an extreme instance of the facility with which the audiences of the time accepted the most inconceivable disguises. It is odd that one of Chapman's comedies, *May Day*,* should contain one of the very few satires upon the convention of disguise which occur in Elizabethan literature. "Though it be the stale refuge of miserable poets," says Angelo, "by change of a hat or a cloak to alter the whole state of a comedy, so as the father must not know his own child, forsooth, nor the wife her husband, yet you must not think they do in earnest carry it away so." This comes strangely from the man who, of all others, carried the convention to the most extravagant lengths.

The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois, a sequel to this popular tragedy of blood, seems also to have been successful. It is a model of impotence in construction. Act I contains nothing except Montsurry's refusal of Clermont d'Ambois's

*Act II, Sc. 1.

challenge. Acts II, III and IV are devoted to the preparation, execution and final defeat of the plot to get Clermont d'Ambois out of the way—in other words, to an episode which merely retards the essential action of the play. The whole of that action is compressed into Act V, with its murders, its suicide, and its dance of ghosts. Here is the stage-direction:

> Music, and the Ghost of Bussy enters, leading the Ghosts of the Guise, Monsieur, Cardinal Guise, and Chatillon. They dance about the dead body [of Montsurry] and exeunt.

Clermont d'Ambois, who does not know that Guise and the Cardinal have been murdered, expresses mild surprise on seeing them among the ghosts; but spectres are so common at the Court of France (as Chapman sees it) that no one turns a hair on encountering them.

Chapman's other chronicle-plays from French history, *Byron's Conspiracy, Byron's Tragedy* and *The Tragedy of Chabot, Admiral of France,* afford the most amazing testimony to the appetite of Jacobean audiences for sheer laboured declamation, with scarcely a gleam of dramatic life in it. Charles Lamb admits that "dramatic imitation was not his talent," and even Swinburne, speaking of the "small epic" of Byron, says "that such a poem should ever have been 'acted in two plays at the Blackfriars and other public stages' must seem to us one of the strangest records in theatrical history."* As we are here concerned with dramatic, not with purely poetic, quality, we need not dwell further on Chapman's tragedies.

In his comedies, on the other hand, critics have discovered much dramatic merit: let us look, then, at *All Fools,* his admitted masterpiece in the lighter vein. It seems to Swinburne "one of the most faultless examples of high comedy to be found in the whole rich field of our Elizabethan drama." Listen to its plot:

Gostanzo and Marc Antonio are two knights of Florence. Gostanzo has a son and a daughter, Valerio and Bellonora;

*Contemporaries of Shakespeare, p. 79.

Marc Antonio has two sons, Fortunio and Rinaldo. Gostanzo has made his son, Valerio, the "overseer of his pastures," and considers him a rustic paragon, free from all the vices of the town and far too bashful even to look at a woman. As a matter of fact, Valerio has a very free hand on the dice-box, and has secretly married a lady named Gratiana. In order that Valerio may conveniently enjoy the society of his wife, Rinaldo, who has a genius for "gulling," tells Gostanzo that Fortunio (his elder brother) is secretly married to Gratiana, and suggests that he (Gostanzo) should take the young couple into his house until Marc Antonio is reconciled to the match. Gostanzo despises Marc Antonio's lax method of bringing up his children, and is delighted at the opportunity of crowing over him by contrasting Valerio's submissive virtue with Fortunio's headstrong disobedience. Accordingly he agrees with alacrity to harbour Fortunio and Gratiana; and in securing this end, Rinaldo kills two birds with one stone; for while Valerio and Gratiana can thus be together, Fortunio, nominally the husband of Gratiana, can in fact take advantage of the opportunity to make love to Gostanzo's daughter Bellonora. So far good. A modern play with such an intrigue would be regarded, not as "high comedy," but as extremely conventional farce. The question of nomenclature, however, does not greatly concern me; if *All Fools* were a good play, of whatever order, I should not quarrel as to the precise pigeon-hole in which to place it. But mark what follows. Gostanzo sees Valerio embracing Gratiana, and concludes that he is trying to seduce her from her allegiance to her husband, Fortunio. Unwilling that this should go on, he decrees that Fortunio and Gratiana must leave his house. But the ingenious Rinaldo has another device ready for further "gulling" Gostanzo. Gratiana is to be introduced into Marc Antonio's house on the pretence (as Gostanzo thinks it) that she is the wife, not of Fortunio, but of Valerio; and Gostanzo is to help in this deception (as he believes it) by pretending great wrath against Valerio for his surreptitious marriage.

Human speech does not supply the machinery for making clear this maze of mendacity, this criss-cross of deception and dupery.* The brain reels in the attempt to straighten it out. Nor is the intrigue so developed as to lead to any skilfully-elaborated and diverting situation, such as sometimes excuses, and almost justifies, the incredible complications imagined by French farce-writers. There is a certain rude merit in the character of Gostanzo, a self-satisfied, overbearing, unprincipled blockhead, who thinks that he is duping Marc Antonio, while he himself is being mercilessly duped. But the intrigue (not to put too fine a point on it) is frigid foolishness; nor is it helped by an under-plot turning on the favourite theme of brutal jealousy. It is a little exasperating to find eulogies lavished on such a play, while modern work which has ten times its ingenuity and twenty times its truth, is either ignored or treated with uncomprehending disdain.

The redeeming feature of the piece is the occasional beauty of its verse and the racy vigour of its prose. The Elizabethans somehow caught the language at a fortunate moment; and Chapman, if one of the lesser dramatists, was one of the greater poets of his time. Here, for instance, is a noble anticipation of Coleridge's "All thoughts, all passions, all delights":

> I tell thee Love is Nature's second sunne,
> Causing a spring of vertues where he shines;
> And as without the sunne, the world's great eye,
> All colours, beauties, both of Arte and Nature,
> Are give in vaine to men, so without Love
> All beauties bred in women are in vaine,
> All vertues borne in men lye buried;
> For Love informes them as the sunne doth colours,
> And as the sunne, reflecting his warme beames
> Against the earth, begets all fruites and flowers,
> So Love, fayre shining in the inward man,
> Brings foorth in him the honourable fruites

*Chapman borrowed largely from the *Heautontimorumenos* and the *Adelphi* of Terence; and it must be owned that the plot of the former play is sufficiently hard to follow. Terence confesses that in the *Heautontimorumenos* he "doubled" Menander's plot, and Chapman ran together two plays of Terence. No wonder the result was a labyrinth.

> Of valour, wit, vertue, and haughty thoughts,
> Brave resolution, and divine discourse.

This is fine verse; but fine verse does not make a great or even a good play.

I shall not spend much time over John Marston. I mention him mainly because his reputation affords a very good example of the curious phenomenon that often encounters us in orthodox Elizabethan criticism. The critics have not dealt at all gently with him; they have admitted that his characteristics are mainly faults; and yet no one has drawn what seems the obvious conclusion, that he is a bad and barbarous playwright. On the contrary, by adding up his defects, you seem to arrive at a large sum-total of merit, and you assign him a rather eminent position among the giants that were in those days. Nor is he a solitary example of this remarkable survival of the unfittest. Orthodox criticism is rather fond of first riddling a play with censure and then pronouncing it a flawless masterpiece, first breaking a playwright on the wheel, and then assigning him a seat among the elect, on the right hand of Shakespeare.

It would take too long to demonstrate the childish incompetence displayed in the structure of the ten acts of melodrama known as *Antonio and Mellida* and *Antonio's Revenge*. I must be content with one or two examples of the poet's style and taste. Here is the speech in which Antonio dedicates himself to revenge:

> May I be cursed by my father's ghost,
> And blasted with incensed breath of Heaven,
> If my heart beat on aught but vengeance!
> May I be numbed with horror, and my veins
> Pucker with singeing torture, if my brain
> Digest a thought but of dire vengeance;
> May I be fettered slave to coward Chance
> If blood, heart, brain plot aught save vengeance.

In pursuance of this resolve he presently murders the little Julio, son of his enemy, Duke Piero, and brother of Mellida, whom he loves. For the sake of Mellida, he hesitates to

commit the crime, but the Ghost of his father, Andrugio, shrieks "Revenge," and Antonio proceeds thus:

> Stay, stay, dear father, fright mine eyes no more.
> Revenge as swift as lightning bursteth forth,
> And cleaves his heart.—Come, pretty, tender child,
> It is not thee I hate, not thee I kill.
> Thy father's blood that flows within thy veins
> Is it I loathe; is that revenge must suck.
> I love thy soul; and were thy heart lapped up
> In any flesh but in Piero's blood,
> I would thus kiss it; but being his, thus, thus,
> And thus I'll punch it. Abandon fears:
> Whilst thy wounds bleed, my brow shall gush out tears.
> *Julio.* So you will love me, do even what you will.
> *Antonio.* Now barks the wolf against the full-cheek'd moon:
> Now lions' half-clam'd entrails roar for food;
> Now croaks the toad, and night-crows screech aloud,
> Fluttering 'bout casements of departed souls;
> Now gape the graves, and through their yawns let loose
> Imprison'd spirits to revisit earth;
> And now, swart night, to swell thy hour out,
> Behold I spurt warm blood in thy black eyes.

He kills the child, and a groan is heard from beneath the stage; whereupon he proceeds:

> Howl not, thou putry mould; groan not, ye graves;
> Be dumb all breath. Here stands Andrugio's son,
> Worthy his sire.

It is very true: the ghost-sire and the living son are eminently worthy of each other. In the last act we have the stereotyped Elizabethan effect of a murder committed by a body of masquers at a banquet; but the details are worthy of notice. Whilst the conspirators are dancing, the Ghost of Andrugio appears in a gallery, to superintend the scene, saying:

> Here will I sit, spectator of revenge,
> And glad my ghost in anguish of my foe.

Then the masquers whisper to Duke Piero, who says:

> Marry and shall; i' faith I were too rude
> If I gainsaid so civil fashion.—

Then, addressing the company:

> The masquers pray you to forbear the room
> Till they have banqueted. Let it be so.
> No man presume to visit them, on death.

Can anything feebler be conceived than this method of clearing the stage? Why on earth should the guests at a banquet be dismissed, on peril of death, in order that four masquers may sup alone? Here is indeed a simplification of the playwright's task. The masquers then whisper again to the Duke, who says:

> Only myself? O why, with all my heart;
> I'll fill your consort.

The rest of the company all retire, and the Duke continues:

> Here Piero sits;
> Come on, unmask, let's fall to.

Then, as the stage-direction puts it, "The conspirators bind Piero, pluck out his tongue and triumph over him."

Antonio. Murder and torture! No prayers, no entreats!

Pandulpho. We'll spoil your oratory. Out with his tongue.

Antonio. I have 't, Pandulpho; the veins panting bleed,
Trickling fresh gore about my fist. Bind fast—so, so!

Ghost of Andrugio. Bless'd be thy hand! I taste the joys of heaven
Viewing my son triumph in his black blood.

Finally a dish is uncovered before Piero's eyes, containing the mangled limbs of his child Julio. For two more pages they continue the torture of Piero, addressing him as "Scum of the mud of hell!" "Slime of all filth!" "Thou most detested toad!" and so forth. I do not say that these epithets do the Duke substantial injustice; but I do say that to treat this sanguinary balderdash as dramatic literature, and to give its author a place even among the retinue of Shake-

speare, is to exhibit obtuseness to the true essence of drama, and a total absence of any sense of proportion.

That Marston had a horribly coarse mind is generally admitted; but he is at the same time credited with imagination and "passionate earnestness." If it be a sign of earnestness to have no gleam of humour, the quality may be allowed him. When he tried to write comedy, as in *The Malcontent*, what he actually produced was a melodrama without murders, but full of lust and violence, and worked out by means of the most preposterous disguises. Nor is the over-estimation of Marston as a dramatist to be explained by the usual confusion of dramatic with poetic merit; for his poetic gift is of the slightest. He is crabbed, pedantic, violent, often grotesque. The lyric note which, in many of his fellows, suborns the verdict of criticism, is mainly lacking in him.

Marston's work is distinctly archaic. In Middleton, though perhaps not a much younger man, a more modern note is perceptible. Some of his plays, such as *Michaelmas Term* and *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, are spirited transcripts of contemporary life, full of coarseness and gross exaggeration, and all turning upon the favourite theme of "Cozenage"—rascality versus credulity—but realistic in spirit and aim, and not without a certain power of characterisation. "Hogarthian" is Swinburne's appropriate term; but they are very far from showing Hogarth's exquisite finish of workmanship. His essays in a more imaginative style are very justly hit off by Swinburne in his remarks on *Blurt, Master Constable*. This play, he says, is:

> A notable example of the best and the worst qualities which distinguish or disfigure the romantic comedy of the Shakespearean age. The rude and reckless composition, the rough intrusion of savorless farce, the bewildering combinations of incident and the far more bewildering fluctuations of character—all the inconsistencies, incongruities, incoherences of the piece are forgotten when the reader remembers and reverts to the passages of exquisite and fascinating beauty which relieve and redeem the utmost errors of negligence and haste.*

*Introduction to *Middleton*, Mermaid Series, p. 4.

Here the critic gives away the fundamental fallacy of his school—every possible fault of construction and characterisation, the two essentials of drama, are to be forgiven, and as far as possible forgotten, for the sake of a few wholly inessential passages of verbal beauty.

Middleton's real power, however, is best seen in two tragic plays, *Women Beware Women*, which he wrote unaided, and *The Changeling*, written in collaboration with William Rowley. The character of Livia in the former play is a really impressive type of the thoroughly abandoned woman, delighting in evil for its own sake; and there is no small dramatic force in some of the scenes—notably in that in which the hapless Leantio returns, after a few days' absence, to his newly-wedded wife, to find her corrupted in body and soul. But the piece degenerates in the end into a mere butchery of the conventional type—a revel and masque being seized as an opportunity for wholesale murder.

The Changeling is worthy of closer study. Its "horribly striking" power was pointed out by Walter Scott, even before the appearance of Lamb's *Specimens*. The theme is undoubtedly very tragic; but the treatment affords an excellent example of the way in which the minor Elizabethans neglected verisimilitude, ignored psychology, and concentrated their whole effort on the elements of lust and horror.

Middleton found the outlines of the story in John Reynolds's *God's Revenge Against Murther*. Reynolds tells how Beatrice Joanna, daughter of a governor of Alicante, was betrothed by her father to one Alonzo Piracquo, but loved a certain Alsemero. She would not allow Alsemero to incur the risk of challenging Piracquo; but, without Alsemero's knowledge, she requested "a gallant young gentleman" named De Flores to assassinate the unwelcome suitor. This was successfully accomplished; and Beatrice Joanna married Alsemero; but about three months after their marriage, her husband's jealousy alienated her affection, and she took De Flores for her lover. Alsemero, discovering them together, killed them, and then came himself to a bad end which need not concern us.

Middleton saw, very justly, that this story demanded concentration for dramatic purposes. The part played by the gallant young De Flores, who, out of devotion to Beatrice, commits a murder in order that she may marry another man, is utterly feeble and even inexplicable. She does ultimately become his mistress, but only because she happens to have quarrelled with her husband. Middleton saw that the drama lay in her putting herself, for love of one man, into the power of another; and so far he was right—this is an intensely dramatic theme. But what does he do? He makes De Flores, instead of a gallant young gentleman, a hideously ugly and ruffianly retainer of Beatrice's father, who follows her about like a dog, only to be flouted and insulted by her on every possible occasion. She knows that he must feel bitter resentment of the ostentatious contempt and loathing with which she constantly treats him; and yet this is the man with whom she plots a murder, imagining that he will be content with a money reward! Such imbecility is not in nature—at any rate not in the nature of Beatrice Joanna, who, though utterly unscrupulous, is a clever woman. A dramatist of any skill, who wanted to handle this situation, would arrange things so that Beatrice Joanna could reasonably expect her hired assassin to be content with his money-wage. He might, for instance, be a needy adventurer whom she had befriended, and whom she had no reason to suspect of any hungry passion for herself; or he might be a moonstruck youth, whom she knew to be hopelessly infatuated with her, and believed to be capable of doing murder simply for a smile and a kiss of the hand. In one way or another, in short, the assassin ought to be a plausible instrument for her purpose, not one whose feeling towards her she knew to be a combination of lust and hatred. And this was necessary not only from the psychological but also from the purely theatrical point of view. One of the great effects of the play ought to have lain in her amazement and consternation when the murderer, instead of humbly accepting his wages, demanded of her the one recompense she most abhorred to give him. This scene Middleton

does not fail to present; but it is discounted by our sense of the sheer silliness of Beatrice Joanna's action. Her simplicity is actually comic. When De Flores says:

> Is anything
> Valued too precious for my recompense?

her answer is, "I understand you not"; and then the scene goes on:

> *De Flores.* I could ha' hired
> A journeyman in murder at this rate,
> And mine own conscience might have slept at ease
> And have had the work brought home.
> *Beatrice* (*aside*). I'm in a labyrinth;
> What will content him? I'd fain be rid of him.
> (*aloud*). The double sum, sir.
> *De Flores.* You take a course
> To double my vexation, that's the good you do.
> *Beatrice* (*aside*). Bless me, I'm now in worse plight than I was;
> I know not what will please him.

Then, when he has made his demand completely explicit, she says:

> *Beatrice.* Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
> Or shelter such a cunning cruelty,
> To make his death the murderer of my honour!
> Thy language is so bold and vicious,
> I cannot see which way I can forgive it
> With any modesty.
> *De Flores.* Pish! you forget yourself;
> A woman dipped in blood, and talk of modesty!

This passage has been greatly admired, and would indeed be admirable if the relation of the speakers had been so adjusted as to render Beatrice's surprise and horror credible. As it is, her emotions are naïve to the point of ludicrousness.

But the scene leaves us face to face with a situation full of dramatic possibilities. Here is a woman so intensely in love with a man, that she will murder an inconvenient obstacle to their union, who suddenly finds a pistol held to her head, so to speak, with the demand that she shall surrender

herself to a brutal ruffian whom her soul abhors. What is she to do? There are two courses open to her, either of which would lead to fine dramatic developments. She might deny all complicity in the murder of Piracquo, and declare that De Flores is simply attempting to blackmail her. Given the character of Beatrice Joanna as presented in the play, this seems her most probable and hopeful course. De Flores has no proof whatever that she incited him to the murder, and she could argue with much plausibility that he was merely taking revenge for her abominable treatment of him. She might even say to her tormentor, like the Duke of Wellington, "Publish and be d——d," pointing out to him that he would simply be putting his own neck in the noose. But of course it would have been very easy for the dramatist to exclude this line of action by giving De Flores some material proof of her complicity; and in any case she might feel herself lacking in the effrontery necessary to brazen the thing out. The second course would then offer itself—and this would be at once the simplest and the most fruitful, perhaps, in truly dramatic possibilities. She might go to her intended husband, confess the crime to which her love for him had driven her, and implore him to protect her from the brute who was threatening her. How Alsemero would take the confession would, of course, depend upon his character. There are several possible turns which the action might take, all very interesting and effective. We need not speculate further upon these might-have-beens; it is enough to point out that any number of branching ways were open to the dramatist, had he taken the trouble to think the thing out.

Then a third and horribly cynical course of action would have been possible. Beatrice Joanna might have said to De Flores: "Yes, I will take you for my secret lover; but you must be so moderate in your claims as not to make my marriage impossible." Then the catastrophe would have come about from De Flores' inevitable failure to act up to this compact. He would have become importunate, overbearing and foolhardy, so that Alsemero would have discovered the intrigue and taken his revenge.

The course which Middleton in fact adopts is something like that which I have just indicated; but he modulates into the key of a mediæval Novella, and concentrates on the physiological rather than the psychological aspect of the situation. I cannot here discuss the crude childishness of the means adopted by Beatrice Joanna to escape detection. It is enough to say that she employs drugs known only to the pharmacopœia of fantasy, and that the audience is regaled with that favourite mediæval titbit—a dark bedchamber, in which one woman is substituted for another. In this case the savour of the situation is heightened by the fact that we see Beatrice Joanna waiting and fuming outside the door of the room in which her waiting-woman, Diaphanta, has taken her place. The play winds up with a series of grisly episodes which do not even show any ingenuity of invention.

Here, then, we have a drama which is full of good material, spoilt partly by sheer lack of thought, partly by a wilful and quite unnecessary dragging to the front of the physical incidents of depravity, with the obvious design of tickling the sensual imagination of the audience. To the Elizabethan public, an ounce of sexual suggestion was worth a pound of psychological analysis or moral casuistry. *The Changeling* is, in fact, a good play gone wrong: it rattles at the joints, and falls to pieces at a touch for lack of thoughtful and rational adjustment. And in this respect it is absolutely typical. The plays of the period which will stand even the least exacting tests of external plausibility or internal consistency are few indeed. What distinguishes *The Changeling* from the general ruck of Elizabethan melodramas is that it more narrowly misses being a good play.* We feel that Middleton was a real dramatist, who, in another environment, would have been capable of working up to higher standards.

And if this is true of Middleton, far more is it true of Philip Massinger. Massinger's fate has been curious and significant. Though one of his plays, *A New Way to Pay*

*I have said nothing of the distasteful and tedious under-plot, usually ascribed to Rowley.

Old Debts, survived on the stage longer and more genuinely than any other non-Shakespearean play—Sir Giles Overreach being one of the stock characters of all our great tragedians—yet Massinger has been, one may almost say, pointedly omitted from the general apotheosis of the minor Elizabethans. While Webster, Ford and Tourneur have been lauded to the skies, Massinger has been treated almost as a negligible quantity. And why? Simply because we seldom or never find in his work those patches of verbal poetry on which nineteenth-century criticism fastened its attention; and because he had not the gift of those unexpectednesses, if I may so call them—like the famous "Cover her face: mine eyes dazzle: she died young"—which had come to be regarded as the final proof of dramatic genius. As a matter of fact, Massinger was, in a sane and sober way, one of the best writers of the period. He seldom indulged in mere outrageous rants, seldom in verbal quibbling. He often produced flat and prosaic lines; but who did not? His metrical sense was, I think, unusually good. He was apt to write very loose blank verse, full of redundant syllables; but it is almost always possible to speak it metrically; the rhythm is almost always clearly perceptible in it: he did not produce the hideous cacophonies, neither verse nor prose, which are so common in Webster, Middleton and others. It is, however, quite true that he was not a non-dramatic poet, a poet independent of the dramatic form. In an anthology of lyrical beauties, he would be almost, or quite, unrepresented. But when we come to specifically dramatic gifts—which are, after all, somewhat important in a dramatist—we find him head and shoulders above the average of his fellows. Shakespeare apart, of course, his only rivals are Beaumont and Fletcher; and in my judgment he not only had a cleaner, saner mind than they, but more real ingenuity and a truer sense of dramatic effect. If he had lived in Spain he would have been a formidable rival of Lope and Calderón. If he had lived in France a hundred years ago, the elder Dumas and Victor Hugo would have had to look to their laurels.

I so often quote Swinburne only to dissent from him that I welcome an opportunity of citing a passage with the general drift of which, in so far as it concerns Massinger, I cordially agree:

> In his own day (says Swinburne)* Massinger would seem to have received, if not such honours as English lovers of dramatic poetry might think due to him in such days as ours, yet undoubtedly very much more recognition than was accorded to poets of far purer and more potent inspiration. Ford, as a master of perverse or noble passion, of stately style and severe fervor in presentation or suggestion of condensed and subdued tragedy, stands far above him; Tourneur stands higher than Ford; and Webster, if compared to them, is as Shakespeare if compared with Webster. But if Massinger cannot be classed, as a poet, with the least of these, it is no less certain that the best of them cannot be ranked as an artist, I do not say equal, but comparable, to Massinger. That, as Coleridge said, he is "always entertaining"—that "his plays have the interest of novels"—is but one of the excellent qualities which make the long eclipse of his fame so inexplicable.

This is the one passage I remember in Swinburne which recognises the distinction between poetical and dramatic merit. Let us welcome it with gratitude; but let us not fail to note that in his other dithyrambs on that majestic trinity, Ford, Tourneur and Webster—great, greater, greatest—he has totally omitted to mention that not one of them "as an artist" was comparable with Massinger. Yet in appraising a dramatist, if you want to "see him steadily and see him whole," it is surely advisable to take into account his qualities "as an artist," which in this context can only mean "as a dramatic craftsman." If the author of *The Duchess of Malfy* was not comparable as an artist to the author of *A New Way to Pay Old Debts, The Roman Actor* and *Believe as You List*—which it would be absurd to class as great masterpieces—the inevitable inference would seem to be that, in point of artistry, *The Duchess of Malfy* is a pretty poor play. That is precisely what I tried to show in my second lecture. If that admission accompanied the trumpetings of its almost Shakespearean greatness to which we are

*Contemporaries of Shakespeare, p. 169.

accustomed, we should be well on the way to sanity; though it might be difficult to understand how a poor play could at the same time be a great tragedy. But no admission of dramatic defects accompanies these trumpetings. We are asked to accept as entire and perfect chrysolites plays which, by Swinburne's admission in the passage before us, are inferior in artistry—beyond comparison inferior—to the only moderately skilful productions of a man who is commonly relegated to the third rank. I submit that there is no sense of proportion in criticism like this. It is inconsistent with itself: it is incoherent.

Perhaps you may say that I am taking advantage of Swinburne's well-known mannerism, his trick of working himself into a frenzy of hyperbolical enthusiasm for whatever writer happens for the moment to be under his magnifying-glass, in order to convict him of verbal and trivial inconsistencies. But this is not so. I am not making a point against Swinburne in particular, but against the whole school of which he is the reverberating mouthpiece. They very frequently admit the most damning faults and limitations in their idols, only (it would seem) to let them drop out of sight again when it comes to forming a final estimate. Ibsen's Mrs. Alving says of her unlamented husband that he was one of those men whose life does not bite upon their reputation. Similarly, may we not say of several of the Elizabethans that their works do not bite on their reputation? The glaring faults and imperfections in which their plays admittedly abound somehow vanish in the general effulgence of their glory.

To return to Massinger: Coleridge touches on one very essential point when he says that he is "always entertaining." He is incomparably more readable than any of his contemporaries except Beaumont and Fletcher; and he is more readable even than they, inasmuch as he is less disgusting. This means, of course, that he is a good dramatic story-teller, which is surely no slight merit, to begin with. Then he has a fine instinct for romantic themes: some of his stories are excellent. Shakespeare's greatness, it seems

to me—though my friend Mr. John Robertson denounces this view as idolatrous—his greatness, I say, is in nothing more conspicuous than in his choice of themes. While Jonson expended his learning on laborious reproductions of comparatively insignificant episodes like those of *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, Shakespeare went straight to the world-historic crises of *Julius Cæsar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. The great tragedies, from *Romeo and Juliet* to *Lear*, are great, not merely through his handling, but in virtue of the inherent magnitude of their matter.* As we look through the tragedies of his contemporaries, of Chapman, Marston, Ford, Webster, Tourneur, Heywood, does it ever occur to us to say, "What a pity that Shakespeare did not hit upon this theme"? It certainly never occurs to *me*. I always feel that Shakespeare's instinct led him to the pick of the bunch. But among Massinger's romantic stories there are one or two which we feel to be almost worthy of glorification by the master's touch: and a higher compliment to Massinger's dramatic instinct it would be hard to pay.

One such story is that of *The Bondman;* and here it is not only Massinger's instinct in the choice of themes, but his actual invention which I hold to be admirable; for, though the setting of the play came from Plutarch, the plot is the dramatist's own. The Syracusans, threatened by the Carthaginians, appoint Timoleon of Corinth their generalissimo. His first demand is that they shall bring all their wealth into the common treasury. Those who have great possessions demur to this capital levy; when Cleora, the daughter of the so-called prætor, Archidamus, in an eloquent speech, reproves their parsimony, and tells them that they must throw all they have and are into the struggle, for the Hun is at the gate. This is but the prologue to the action. We arrive at the real gist of the play when the young Leosthenes, departing for the war, and taking leave of the said Cleora, his betrothed, offends her by his vulgar doubts of her constancy during his absence. This is her reply:

*This is perhaps less true of *Othello* than of the others. We can imagine Beaumont and Fletcher treating this theme—and we can also imagine the mess they would have made of it.

Cleora. Will you then confirm
That love and jealousy, though of different natures,
Must of necessity be twins; the younger
Created only to defeat the elder,
And spoil him of his birthright? 'tis not well.
But being to part, I will not chide, I will not;
Nor with one syllable or tear express
How deeply I am wounded with the arrows
Of your distrust: but when that you shall hear
At your return how I have borne myself,
And what an austere penance I take on me,
To satisy your doubts; when, like a Vestal,
I show you, to your shame, the fire still burning,
Committed to my charge by true affection,
The people joining with you in the wonder;
When, by the glorious splendor of my sufferings,
The prying eyes of jealousy are struck blind,
The monster, too, that feeds on fears, e'en starv'd
For want of seeming matter to accuse me;
Expect, Leosthenes, a sharp reproof
From my just anger.

Leosthenes. What will you do?

Cleora. Obey me,
Or from this minute you're a stranger to me,
And do 't without reply. (*She hands him a scarf.*)
All-seeing sun,
Thou witness of my innocence, thus I close
Mine eyes against thy comfortable light,
Till the return of this distrustful man!
Now bind them sure;—nay, do't.
(*He binds her eyes with the scarf.*)
If uncompell'd
I loose this knot until the hands that made it
Be pleased to untie it, may consuming plagues
Fall heavy on me! Pray you guide me to your lips.
This kiss, when you come back, shall be a virgin
To bid you welcome; nay, I have not done yet:
I will continue dumb, and, you once gone,
No accent shall come from me. Now to my chamber,
My tomb, if you miscarry: there I'll spend
My hours in silent mourning, and thus much
Shall be reported of me to my glory,
And you confess it, whether I live, or die,
My chastity triumphs o'er your jealousy.

Now I venture to say that this is a very charming piece of romance. The lines

> But being to part, I will not chide, I will not:
> Nor with one syllable or tear express
> How deeply I am wounded with the arrows
> Of your distrust

almost tempt one to withdraw the admission that Massinger is deficient in verbal felicities.

Well, the Syracusans of military age having all set forth to fight the Carthaginians, a slave named Marullo stirs up a servile insurrection. The slaves become masters of the city: and though Marullo orders them to shed no blood, he makes no attempt to check other excesses. Cleora, still blindfolded and mute, hears appalling accounts of the conduct of the slaves throughout the city, and is in an agony of fear when her own bondman, Marullo, enters her chamber. But he comes only to treat her with reverent chivalry. He indicates vaguely that he is not what he seems, tells her that love for her has been the prime motive of his conduct, but abjures all thought of taking the slightest advantage of her helplessness, or even interfering with the blindness and silence she has imposed upon herself in witness of her love for another. You see the situation and can doubtless anticipate how it works out. The masters return and quell the revolt by a legendary device which is one of the weak points in the play. Leosthenes is with difficulty persuaded that Cleora has not undergone the fate of so many other women, and when she expresses her admiration for Marullo's conduct, is unwise enough to treat it with contempt. Cleora cannot but contrast the magnanimity of the slave with the churlish pettiness of the master, and her heart gradually veers from the one to the other. It proves, of course, that Marullo is in reality no slave, but a gentleman of Thebes, Pisander by name, who has assumed this disguise out of love for Cleora. There is a good deal that is conventional and absurd in the winding-up of the story; and it is a manifest blot on it that the hero, Marullo-Pisander, should have engineered the servile revolt, with all its horrors, to

advance his private ends. It ought clearly to have broken out independently of him; and he ought to have run some risk in defending his master's house from the general license. But, details apart, I say that the Leosthenes-Cleora-Pisander situation is an ingenious and charming one, which Shakespeare might very well have handled; and there are one or two touches in the part of Cleora which he could not very well have bettered.

Another play with a fine romantic theme is *The Picture*—I cannot now describe it. But a word must be said of *The Great Duke of Florence*, a charming comedy, which Shakespeare's touch might have transmuted into an immortal masterpiece. The subject was suggested to Massinger by an old Morality, *A Knack to Know a Knave;* but the whole merit of the invention is his own.

The Prince Giovanni, nephew of Duke Cosimo of Florence, has been educated at the country-house of a noble preceptor, Carolo Charamonte, who has a lovely daughter, Lidia. The two young people have grown up together, and their boy-and-girl affection is just ripening into something deeper, when one day a messenger arrives from Duke Cosimo with orders for Giovanni's immediate return to court. And here I may note a point which illustrates the carelessness of the Elizabethans for what seems to us not only legitimate, but almost obligatory, dramatic effect. A modern playwright would assuredly take care that Lidia should learn while on the stage of Giovanni's recall, and that the audience should see the effect of the sudden shock on her. There would be nothing artificial in this: it would be absolutely natural and probable. But Massinger ignores the opportunity. Before Lidia makes her first entrance she has learnt—we do not know how—that she is to lose Giovanni. The young people part with poignant regret but with perfect dignity.

The courtier who escorts Giovanni to Florence tells Duke Cosimo of the matchless beauty of Charamonte's daughter; and the Duke (who, by the way, is a widower) sends his favourite, Sanazarro, to inspect and report upon her. Sana-

zarro is betrothed to the Duke's ward. Fiorinda, Duchess of Urbino; but the moment he sets eyes on Lidia he is madly captivated by her, and eager to secure her for himself. Accordingly, on his return to court, he seeks out Giovanni and represents to him the danger that, if the Duke sees Lidia, he will make her his Duchess, and so balk him (Giovanni) of his expected succession to the throne. Giovanni does not greatly care about the succession, but does not want Lidia to be his aunt; so, against his better judgment, he consents to Sanazarro's proposal that they shall join in representing to the Duke that Lidia's charms have been greatly exaggerated, and that she is really a quite commonplace and rather stupid little person. But unfortunately, before this scheme has been agreed upon, Giovanni has seen the Duchess Fiorinda, has described Lidia to her in glowing terms, and has begged her to obtain for her an appointment at Court. Giovanni tries to warn the Duchess that this scheme is "off," but has no time. Almost immediately after Giovanni has been depreciating Lidia, Fiorinda appears and repeats to the Duke the passionate praise he has bestowed upon his tutor's daughter. The Duke realises that he is somehow being trifled with, and determines to go and see Charamonte's daughter for himself. Giovanni and Sanazarro get ahead of him and try to pass off a waiting-maid, Petronella, as Lidia. This is the incident which Massinger borrowed from the old play; and, being farcically treated, it is the chief blot upon the comedy. The Duke is naturally very angry at the conduct of his nephew and his favourite; but through the magnanimity of Fiorinda, and the nobility as well as beauty of Lidia, his wrath is appeased, and all ends happily. I will not pretend that Lidia has anything like the charm Shakespeare would have lent her, but she is a remarkably graceful and attractive figure; and the whole play is one that might have been written by a gentleman. Of how few plays in this vaunted literature can we say as much!

Certainly not of all Massinger's other plays. The sanctimonious vulgarity of *The Virgin Martyr* and *The Renegade*

are, to me, very unpleasant. The title-character in *The Guardian* is one of those disgusting old ruffians, more popular after the Restoration than before the Civil War, who remind us of Falstaff only to make us realise afresh the magic quality of Shakespeare's art. *The Duke of Milan* is a play founded on a fine idea. Ludovico Sforza is so madly enamoured of his Duchess Marcelia that he cannot endure the thought of her surviving him, and accordingly, in setting out for the wars, instructs his favourite, Francisco, to kill her, if he, Sforza, should not return. The effect upon Marcelia of the revelation of this insane masculine egoism might form the subject of a most interesting study; but the play, as a matter of fact, tails off into a mere tragedy of blood. I have no time to do more than mention *The Maid of Honour* (in which the heroine, Camiola, is a figure of great, if rather overstrained nobility), *The City Madam*, *The Fatal Dowry*, *The Roman Actor* and *Believe as You List*—all very notable plays. No fewer than twelve of Massinger's pieces were among those burnt in manuscript by Warburton's cook. I wish that execrable female had fed her fire with the works of almost any of his contemporaries rather than with his. At all events, I could pick out a dozen of the highly-esteemed masterpieces of the Lamb-Swinburne school of criticism, of which she might much better have made an auto-da-fé. I don't say she would have had my blessing, but I certainly should not have extinguished the flames with my tears.

V

By a curious coincidence—there was no arrangement in the matter—Webster's *Duchess of Malfy* was revived by the Phœnix Society two days before, in my second lecture, I attempted an analysis of it. In noticing the revival, the critic of the *Daily News* said:

> Its performance will bring home to playgoers the hollowness of the old uncritical praise of the great Elizabethan dramatists. Charles Lamb's gentle enthusiasm and Swinburne's boisterous panegyrics have made a legend of Elizabethan drama not founded on fact, as most critical students have known for a long time.

I need not tell you that I am not quoting this criticism to controvert it; but there is one phrase to which I beg leave to append a note of interrogation. Is it true that the hollowness of the legend has long been known to "most critical students"? Am I, then, beating at an open door? I cannot think so. We have seen that the latest eulogist of this very Webster, and the most whole-hearted apologist—nay, eulogist—of the barbarous obscenity that taints almost the whole body of literature, was a brilliant and much lamented representative of the younger generation — Rupert Brooke, to wit. Mr. Lytton Strachey,* fastidious and sceptical, can yet write of "that noble band of Elizabethans, whose strong and splendid spirit gave to England, in one miraculous generation, the most glorious heritage of drama that the world has known." I take up the *Athenæum* for November 14, and I find Mr. T. S. Eliot, a young American of great talent, rebuking Mr. George Gregory Smith, author of a sound and sensible handbook to Ben Jonson, for his "dampening lack of enthusiasm." Mr. Eliot's article opens thus:

> Jonson is the legitimate heir of Marlowe. The man who wrote, in *Volpone:*
>
> for thy love
> In varying figures, I would have contended
> With the blue Proteus, or the horned flood. . . .
>
> and
>
> See, a carbuncle
> May put out both the eyes of our Saint Mark;
> A diamond would have bought Lollia Paulina,
> When she came in like starlight, hid with jewels . . .

*Books and Characters, p. 226.

is related to Marlowe as a poet; and if Marlowe is a poet, Jonson is also.

I think the analogy with Marlowe is suggested (perhaps unconsciously) by the chance coincidence of the last line with Marlowe's glorious

> Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
> Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.

But that Jonson was a poet nobody denies. The line

> When she came in like starlight, hid with jewels

is a magnificent one. The question is not whether he was a poet, but whether he was a great dramatist—whether he and his contemporaries justify Swinburne's assertion that "the silver age of English drama would eclipse the golden age of dramatic poetry in any other nation of modern times."

The movement to which we owe the Phœnix Society took its origin, if I am not mistaken, in a letter contributed to the *Nation* of March 15, 1919, by Messrs. Francis Clarke and H. F. Rubinstein. The writers, inspired by a "growing disgust with the present state of the theatre," invited coöperation among persons who were similarly-minded. Their ideal was

> "a drama that shall reflect the essential features of our national life . . . and at the same time provide something of the imaginative stimulus essential to the pursuance of any healthy social activity. The plays of the so-called Elizabethan period (they proceeded) fulfilled both these conditions to a degree approached at no time and in no place before or since. . . . Here—in the almost faultless technique, the gorgeous colour, and the prodigous vitality attained by such masters as Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher and Massinger—we have surely the soundest as well as the most natural foundation for any national dramatic revival.

Can it be said that I am beating at an open door, when such views can be gravely put forward, and actually meet with a certain response? The writers, increasingly disgusted with the theatre as it is, cast about for some foundation for a "dramatic revival," blandly unconscious that a vigorous and fertile revival has been proceeding for the past twenty years. They find the desired foundation in the Elizabethan drama, which (lumping Shakespeare with Jonson, Fletcher and Massinger) they pronounce to be "unapproached" by the Athenian, the French or the Spanish drama. It is fanaticism

to declare even Shakespeare "unapproached"; to use such an expression of the minor Elizabethans is mere insanity. What the writers mean by "faultless technique" I am unable to guess. Technique is strictly relative to the particular conditions of the theatre (including the audience) for which a play is designed. No doubt some of the Elizabethan writers were good technicians in relation to their own stage, some were bad, and most were good and bad by turns. To call the technique of a whole dramatic literature "almost faultless" is to use words without meaning. If it be said that there is a universal technique, related to the mental constitution and requirements of what may be called the ideal or universal audience, I am the more disposed to agree to this proposition as it merely means that the greatest plays in the world conform to, or embody, that ultimate essence of drama of which we are in search. But theatrical history renders it abundantly manifest that this universal technique was wholly beyond the ken of the minor Elizabethans, who have not maintained their hold of the stage of their own country, and have scarcely found even a momentary footing on any other stage. Messrs. Clarke and Rubinstein, in short, have been hypnotised by the Elizabethan legend, and have founded their dramatic ideal almost as much upon the vices as upon the virtues of Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger and the rest.

Whether the Phœnix Society did or did not spring from the seed they sowed, its very existence shows that there are a good many people (some of them, no doubt, serious students) to whom the legend is still gospel. Even the performance of *The Duchess of Malfy* seems in some quarters (strange to say) to have left Webster's prestige almost intact. Did not the sceptical, unimpressible critic of the *Times* bow down among the worshippers? It is true that Mr. Walkley could not choose but smile at the carnage of the last act. Even when Duke Ferdinand stood on his head to die, and waved his legs in the air, Mr. Walkley's flesh, it would seem, declined to creep. But the fourth act appears to have sent the requisite cold shivers down his spine. He says:

> No one, we think, was tempted even to smile at the ghastly incidents by which the poor Duchess was mentally tortured before being

strangled—the severed hand thrust into hers, the silent entry of the masked and hooded executioners bearing her coffin, and, "creepiest" of all, her encirclement by a crowd of gibbering, wailing madmen. After these horrors, her death by the cord—a quiet, almost peaceful martyrdom—came as a relief. This, at any rate, was on the true tragic level.

So Bedlam-broke-loose is on the true tragic level, is it? If so, I devoutly hope that the British drama may never again rise to the true tragic level. For my part, I thought the spectacle on the stage—the frigidly and mechanically hideous gambols of the lunatics—was only less humiliating than the spectacle presented by the front of the house.

No, the legend which Mr. Baughan supposes to be dead is alive and kicking. I shall be much surprised if it does not kick back at my heresies. Not, of course, that I set up for a heresiarch, the apostle of a new critical doctrine. Any time the last thirty years, we have heard occasional protests against the extravagances of Elizabethan-worship. Mr. Bernard Shaw, when he was tired of making an Aunt Sally of Shakespeare, used to spare a few sticks for his lesser contemporaries. But the exaggerations of his anti-Shakespearism rather discounted his critical judgment as a whole. Mr. (now Sir) William Watson, as a young man, published a keenly critical essay on Webster; but I do not know that he went further in his Elizabethan studies. Other utterances of what I regard as sound doctrine could no doubt be cited. But I am not aware that anyone has yet attempted to find a standard which shall apply alike to the Old Drama and the New. That is my present endeavour; and I propose at this point—before discussing the Restoration and Eighteenth-Century dramatists—to attempt what may be called a provisional confrontation of the Elizabethans with the men of today.

Why has this task been reserved for me? Why has no better-qualified critic taken it out of my hands? The answer is not far to seek. It is that (as I have already pointed out) the New Drama is quite literally a new thing—a product of less than a generation. You cannot institute a comparison between something and nothing: and for nearly a century and a half the British drama had been practically non-existent. If you want to realise its non-existence, you have

only to cast a glance along the shelf of British dramatic criticism. The great critics of the past, so far as they dealt with the theatre of their own time, were critics, not of drama, but of acting. Who remembers a single thing that Lamb, or Hazlitt, or Leigh Hunt, or John Forster, or George Henry Lewes, ever said of a contemporary play? We remember that Lamb enthusiastically admired Sheridan Knowles—a fact which sheds a significant light upon his Elizabethan enthusiasms. But his criticisms which live are criticisms of Bensley and Liston and Munden; just as Hazlitt, and Hunt, and Forster, and Lewis write of the Kembles and Mrs. Siddons and Edmund Kean and Macready and Charles Kean, and so on down to Rachel and Salvini and the great generation of the Théâtre Français. Today it is quite otherwise: in Mr. Shaw's *Dramatic Opinions*, in Mr. Walkley's *Drama and Life*, in Mr. Spence's *Our Stage and Its Critics*, in Mr. Grein's *Dramatic Criticism*, in Mr. Darlington's *Through the Fourth Wall*, the pages devoted to acting are of far less importance than those devoted to new plays and to theories of drama. The New Drama came into being with the present generation. It is even yet struggling to have its existence recognised, and has had no time to think of measuring itself against the drama of the past.

Before passing to that comparison, I have a word to say as to the relation of the Elizabethans to other European dramatists of their own age. You must have noticed, perhaps with tedium, the burden of my criticism: namely that the Elizabethan drama, take it as a whole, is not a civilised but a barbarous product. Perhaps you think that in this I am simply quarrelling with the seventeenth century for not being the nineteenth or the twentieth. But if you think so, believe me, you are wrong. The Elizabethan-Jacobean-Caroline drama was barbarous by *seventeenth-century standards*. I do not profess to be deeply-read in French drama of the opening of the seventeenth century. So far as I have looked into Alexandre Hardy and Rotrou, I judge them to be behind their English contemporaries in life and movement. Their work is stiff and heavy and at the same time wildly extravagant (as, indeed, is the early work of Corneille); but I have

discovered in it none of the crudity and obscenity that so abound in English work of the period. Corneille, born in 1606, was scarcely a contemporary of the Elizabethans. He did not produce *Le Cid* until 1637, when the English theatres were on the point of closing. Thus a comparison of strictly contemporaneous plays is scarcely possible. But the gulf that separates *The Duchess of Malfy, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Maid's Tragedy, Antonio and Mellida* and *Bussy d'Ambois* from *Le Cid, Horace, Cinna* and *Polyeucte* is not to be accounted for by mere lapse of time. If the French public of the first twenty years of the seventeenth century had been as raw as the English public of that time, it could not possibly, in another twenty years, have been ripe for the dignity, the nobility, the intellectual and moral elevation of Corneille. As for comparing Racine and Molière with their English contemporaries, the juxtaposition, as I have already said, is merely humiliating. For the Civil War left the English drama as barbarous as it found it—and rather more unpleasantly so.

When we turn to Spain we can compare two strictly contemporary literatures. Lope de Vega was born two years before Shakespeare (he sailed, you remember, in the Armada), and Calderón, born in 1600, was contemporary with the Caroline playwrights. Now I have only dipped into the ocean of the Spanish drama. I have read a fair amount of Calderón, very little of Lope. But I have also read a good deal about them; and nowhere have I discovered, either at first or second hand, anything even remotely analogous to the barbarisms and brutalities of the Elizabethans. I have no desire to glorify the Spaniards at my countrymen's expense. Perhaps if I were a Spaniard I should now be assuming this same unpopular character of devil's advocate. For Lope I take to have been a little more than a brilliant, perhaps an unequalled, improviser; and I agree with George Henry Lewes that the attempt of the Schlegels to make Calderón a great philosophic dramatist is utterly absurd. He was a man of splendid imagination, with a fine eye for dramatic effect; but to rank *El Magico Prodigioso,* or *El*

Principe Constante, or even *El Alcalde de Zalamea*, with the great plays of Shakespeare, seems to me pure nonsense. Put Massinger into the scale and you might strike a more even balance. Lowell's tribute to Calderón is at the same time a criticism. You remember the verse:

> Bird of today, thy songs are stale
> To his, my singer of all weathers,
> My Calderón, my nightingale,
> My Arab bird in Spanish feathers.

The Spanish classical drama, so far as I know it, has both the beauties and the vices of opera. It is full of bravura passages, often very beautiful. Almost every play of Calderón's could be set to music as it stands. But all this is nothing to the present purpose—I merely want you to understand that I am no blind admirer of what is foreign and disparager of native genius. The present point is that the Spanish drama under the Philips, as contrasted with the English drama under Elizabeth, James and Charles, was a civilised product, full of seemliness and refinement. Its point of honour was sometimes barbarous enough, but barbarous in the metaphorical sense in which the term can be applied to many of our own laws and conventions. Elizabethan barbarism is literal, palpable, naked and unashamed. The proceedings of *El Medico de su Honra* (*The Physician of his own Honour*) are not, in their essence, much less atrocious than the actions of the Arragonians in *The Duchess of Malfy;* but though he may be a savage at heart, he is in manners and speech a gentleman, whereas the Arragonians are not only monsters but blackguards. And the same description applies in too many cases, not only to the villains, but to the heroes, of the Jacobean and Caroline stage.

Let us now turn to the modern English drama, and see what we can learn from the contrast between the matter and methods of our own age, and the matter and methods of the plays we have been discussing in my last two lectures. And first I propose to examine a play by the pioneer of the

modern movement, Sir Arthur Pinero—a man to whom we owe far more gratitude than we have ever paid. He has his limitations, he has his faults: but one thing he is, which so many of the Elizabethans were not—a born dramatist. The series of his maturer works would rightly hold a distinguished place in any dramatic literature.

I take up his play *Letty*, produced in 1903. It is not by any means his best. *The Thunderbolt, Mid-Channel*—that remorseless masterpiece—perhaps even *Iris* and *His House in Order* must be placed above it. But for purposes of illustration it has some peculiar advantages.

We note first that it depicts, with sober fidelity, a definite domain of London life. It presents a section through several strata of society. We have at the top the idle rich, represented by Nevill Letchmere, a man of the world, living what is known as a man's life: his sister, married to a vicious numskull, but trying nevertheless to "run straight"; and the well-groomed "nice boy" who has fallen desperately in love with her. Then we have Mr. Bernard Mandeville, of Hammerstein, Cohen & Mandeville, "bucket-shop" proprietors—the swaggering vulgarian, coarse, sensual, ostentatious. Next we have three types of the young woman in business: Letty Shell, pretty, pleasure-loving, honest, not ill-bred, but poor, anæmic, and inevitably beset by temptations to escape at almost any cost from her life of drudgery; her friend, Marion Allardyce, the prudent, practical, unattractive girl of the same class; and Hilda Gunning, a much lower type than the other two, crassly common, bouncing, self-satisfied, without any moral scruples, but quite likely to get through life without disaster, because she is incapable of passion, of generosity, or of any delicacy of feeling. This, by the way, is the most brilliantly-drawn type in the play. Every word placed in her mouth is a jewel of vulgarity. Finally, we have three lower-middle-class males—men in the street, in the omnibus, in the A.B.C. shop. Now I do not say that there may not be flaws in the drawing of some of these personages; but, taken as a whole, they are recognisably true to life. There are no gross exaggerations, no violent distor-

tions, no set, unvarying attitudes or "humours." We are far indeed from Jonson's Sir Epicure Mammon, Sir Politick Would-be, Sir Amorous La Foole, Fastidious Brisk, Morose, Lady Haughty, Doll Common; far from the roystering profligates, the usurers, the simpletons, the poltroons, the ruffians, and the procuresses of Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Dekker and Heywood; far from such monsters of malignity as Massinger's Sir Giles Overreach and Luke, such paragons of virtue as the same author's Camiola and Cleora. Instead of harsh, violent outlines and coarse splashes of colour, we find an unvarying will, accompanied by very remarkable, if not unerring power, to adhere to the truth of nature. And these faithfully-studied men and women are placed in exactly their natural environment. There may be many opinions as to the right sort of scenery for romantic comedy and tragedy, but there can surely be no doubt that if you are going to draw faithful portraits of certain denizens of the West End of London, you do well to avail yourself of the power possessed by the modern scene-designer to transfer to the stage every detail of a modern interior, whether private room, restaurant, shop, office or studio.

So much for the material—how does Sir Arthur treat it? His first act is placed in Nevill Letchmere's rooms in Grafton Street. An opening passage between Nevill and his brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Ivor Crosbie, shows that the Crosbie ménage is in serious danger, and gives us a glimpse of the undesirable moral heredity of the Letchmere family. This Crosbie affair, be it noted, is not an Elizabethan underplot, but an essential thread in the main fabric of the play. It will in due time have a determining influence on the action. Then arrives Letty Shell, with her friends, Marion and Hilda, the guests at a little tea-party which Nevill is giving in honour of Letty's birthday. That Nevill is strongly attracted by Letty is very evident, and she is a girl of great refinement whom he might quite well marry without making any obvious misalliance. It is equally evident that her two friends, and Letty herself, have very little doubt that this is his intention. Then at the end of the act, when the girls

have left the stage, Nevill is surprised to receive the card of Mr. Bernard Mandeville, whom he knows to be one of Letty's employers. He proves, on entrance, to be a loudly-dressed, coarse-featured man with a heavy moustache and an uneasy swagger. After some beating about the bush, he points out that his firm, Dugdale's, are "white men" who "take an active interest in the moral and general welfare of our gals —see what I mean?" He has learnt through an office tale-bearer that Letty has struck up an acquaintance with "a young swell living in rooms here"; but, he says, "it wasn't till yesterday that I moved in the affair personally."

Nevill. Moved?
Mandeville. Made a few enquiries.
Nevill. As to the— (*With a wry face.*) swell?
Mandeville. I looked upon it—haw—as my duty to sift the rumour.
Nevill. I see.
Mandeville. But I haven't breathed a word to her on the subject. I preferred to come to you direct, sir—man to man, gentleman to gentleman, Mr. Letchmere.

So he goes on, getting more and more on Nevill's nerves, until he comes to the point as follows:

Mandeville. Has Letty—er—ever let out to you, by any chawnce, that she's—haw—rather a favourite of mine?
Nevill. I think I do recall a remark of Miss Shell's to the effect that she feared she monopolised more than a fair share of moral supervision at the hands of a member of your firm.
Mandeville. (*Sulkily.*) Cheeky little baggage! That's her funny way of expressing herself. (*Rising.*) Oh, damn it—as one gentleman to another—I—I've a strong partiality for the gal! There, now you've got it straight.
Nevill. (*After a short silence, during which Mandeville stands glaring into space—drily.*) I appreciate warmly the privilege of being in your confidence, Mr. Mandeville—
Mandeville. Yes, it's between ourselves, of course.

Nevill. (*Getting upon his feet indolently.*) But have you yet conveyed to Miss Shell in a formal manner the sentiments of your tender regard, may I ask?

Mandeville. Er—haw!—not yet.

Nevill. (*With a satirical raising of the brows.*) Not!

Mandeville. That's a business requiring—haw—a good deal of —haw—consideration.

Nevill. Consideration?

Mandeville. (*Worrying his moustache.*) When a gal's beneath you in the social scale—a clerk in your office—see what I mean—?

Nevill. Clearly. And pending your solution of these misgivings, you propose that I should—

Mandeville. Keep off the grass. Keep off—the grass.

Nevill. (*With an ugly smile.*) To make way for you? (*Looking at his watch.*) To make way for you?

Mandeville. (*Beginning to bluster.*) Haw! Why not, sir? At all events I *am* qualified to tell her I'm fairly gone on her—honourably gone on her—if I choose to do it.

Nevill. Qualified?

Mandeville. Which is more than you are, Mr. Letchmere. I *am* a single man; you ain't, bear in mind.

I do not know whether, in this fragmentary presentation, I have conveyed to you any sense of the effect of this speech. Throughout the act there has not been the slightest allusion to the fact that Nevill is married. The girls have no inkling of it, and in the scene between Nevill and his sister there has been no reason why it should be mentioned. Perfectly naturally, without the least strain or effort, yet with deliberate and ingenious art, the author has attained a striking, almost thrilling effect. In that one line "I *am* a single man; you ain't, bear in mind," Mandeville reveals the whole tragedy of the situation. The fact might have been conveyed to the audience in any number of other ways: Sir Arthur Pinero, in waiting until we fully realise all that depends on it, has chosen the very best, because the most dramatic, way. It is an instance, slight but typical, of a refinement of technique wholly unknown to the Elizabethans. They cared nothing for any nice gradation in the unfolding of a story. They blurted things out just as they came. Shakespeare is

again the exception—there is admirable art in the way in which he leads us into the story of the great tragedies. But the skilful modern dramatist deals in more deliberate adjustments than were possible even to Shakespeare. His instrument—the modern theatre—is capable of more nicely-calculated effects.

In the second act, which follows immediately on the first, the irony of poor Letty's position comes home to us most dramatically. Her health is bad. During the time of her acquaintance with Letchmere, she has been starving herself in order to dress well. The doctor says she must have a long holiday in order to recuperate. Far from possessing the means for any such indulgence, she has, we find, borrowed small sums of money from various acquaintances almost as poor as herself, who are relying on prompt payment. But amid all her troubles she is sustained by her confidence in Nevill's love for her, and in his intention of making her his wife; while we, the audience, know that this is impossible. When Nevill arrives, it is not to ask her to marry him, but to recommend her, as a friend, to accept the impending proposal of Mandeville.

Letty. (*Faintly.*) I—I thought you were interested in me.

Nevill. I am. . . . So interested in you am I that I find myself —I admit, to my intense surprise,—counselling you to balance carefully the claims of this eligible bucket-shop proprietor against the dubious advantages of a continued friendship with an individual who is a bachelor only in his mode of living.

Letty. (*Staring at him.*) Why—are you married?

Nevill. Yes, as Mr. Mandeville, who has been examining my credentials, is brutal enough to remind me—yes, I am married.

(*There is a pause. Her cigarette drops from her fingers and she carefully puts her foot upon it.*)

Letty. (*In a low voice.*) You might have mentioned it before. You might have mentioned it.

Here we have, in all its simplicity, without any rhetorical trappings,* without any melodramatic accessories, a tense

*The phrasing of Nevill's speeches is no doubt a little stilted; but this is an unintentional flaw, not an attempt at rhetorical elevation.

and poignant moment in human experience. We have no oratory, no lyric cry, but pure double-distilled drama. We feel the anguish, the precipitous fall from hope to despair, that lie behind the simple phrases: "You might have mentioned it before. You might have mentioned it." The words are surcharged with emotion: wherefore, as I venture to suggest, they are of the very essence of dramatic poetry.

It would take too long to follow Letty's fortunes in detail. She does actually accept Mandeville's offer; but he is ill-advised enough to give a supper to celebrate the occasion, and his blustering, ill-bred conduct so disgusts her that she feels marriage with him impossible. She is on the point of consenting to go abroad with Nevill Letchmere, when he learns that his sister has broken away from her husband and eloped with her youthful adorer. The way in which Nevill receives this news opens Letty's eyes to the degradation she is about to incur. She bids him good-bye and takes up her old hard lot afresh. All the vicissitudes of the drama are compressed, with extraordinary ingenuity, yet with perfect naturalness, into the space of a few hours.

I am not asking you to accept this play as a great masterpiece: I am merely trying to bring home to you the fact that it is the product of an inventive and constructive effort totally different from anything that we find in the lesser Elizabethans. It is an exquisite mosaic of incident and emotion; its character-drawing, if not very deep, is clear and consistent; it presents a broad social picture; and gives us a new insight into the life-problem of girls of the class of Letty. It is not didactic, but it is relevant. It is not, like Elizabethan comedy, a reckless, roystering carnival of vice, rascality and folly, nor, like Elizabethan tragedy, a compound of villainy, crime and carnage. The very fact that it is impossible to range it under either of the conventional rubrics shows that it is a new thing, a growth of the modern age, and raises a fair presumption that it stands in a closer relation to reality. For we do not live either in comedy or in tragedy—we live in life.

This play, I repeat, is only a fair type, not of the best

that the modern stage can do, but simply of good, competent theatrical workmanship. We have at least half a score of writers who can produce work, not quite as good, but quite in the same class—work which is thoughtful, relevant, and so constructed as to extract the fullest measure of dramatic effect out of the given material. I could quote numberless instances of this constructive art, but will merely allude to one. Some of you may remember the first act of the late Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes*. Two old Lancashire mill-hands are sitting anxiously awaiting the return of their daughter, who is supposed to have gone with a girl-friend to spend a week-end at Blackpool. It is clear from their uneasy, fitful talk that they know she was not where she purported to have been, but more than this we do not learn. Then Fanny enters, superficially calm but clearly a little nervous. They ask her where she has been? Why, at Blackpool—did they not get the postcard she sent?

Mrs. Hawthorn. Yes, we got that. Who posted it?
Fanny. I posted it myself. . . . I tell you I've been all week-end at Blackpool with Mary Hollins.
Christopher. (*Quietly.*) No, you've not.
Fanny. (*Pertly.*) Well, that's settled then. . . . Look here, who's been saying I didn't?
Christopher. We know you didn't.
Fanny. But you can't know.
Mrs. Hawthorn. As certain as there's a God in Heaven we know it.
Fanny. Well, that's not so certain, after all.
Christopher. Fanny! Take heed what you're saying.

Fanny says she will go and fetch Mary Hollins to convince them.

Christopher. Fanny, I've already seen Mary Hollins.
Fanny. When?
Christopher. This morning.
Fanny. She was at Blackpool this morning.
Christopher. So was I.
Fanny. (*Amazed.*) What were you doing there?
Christopher. I went there with Jim Hollins. We went on purpose to see Mary.
Fanny. So it's Mary has been giving me away, is it?

Christopher. (*Nodding slowly.*) Yes. You might say so.
Fanny. (*Angrily.*) I'll talk to her.
Christopher. It wasn't her fault. She couldn't help it. . . . When I told thee I went with Jim Hollins to Blackpool, I didn't tell thee quite everything. (*Gently.*) Mary Hollins was drowned yesterday afternoon.

Here is a fine, even a superb, dramatic invention. Imagine the torrent of emotion which sweeps over Fanny's mind as she learns in one agonising moment that her escapade is discovered—she has been at Llandudno with a lover—and that her friend is dead. This is an order of effect entirely unknown to the Elizabethans. It gives us a complex satisfaction—the pleasure arising from a scene of intense and yet of absolutely truthful and natural emotion, and the pleasure arising from the recognition that the artist is making the best possible use of his medium—developing its highest potentialities. How immeasurably inferior is (for example) the scene in Ford's *Broken Heart*, where Calantha goes on dancing her quadrille, seemingly deaf to the news that her father, her friend, and her lover are dead,—the scene which reminded Charles Lamb of Calvary!

It would take a treatise rather than a mere paragraph to show how this enormous advance in technique is bound up with the substitution of the picture-stage for the platform-stage, of prose for verse, and of the true accent of human speech for inflated rhetoric. Let me merely point out that the *Hindle Wakes* scene would have been practically impossible on the Elizabethan stage. What Fanny does on hearing the terrible news is to bury her face in her arms and burst into a long passion of tears—the natural, the inevitable thing. But this is dependent on a natural scene, with the environment of real life. On the bare Elizabethan stage, people had to unpack their heart with words. They could not indulge in the long pauses, the silent action, so common and so effective on a stage on which an accurate imitation of life is possible. Do you remember a single passage, even in Shakespeare, in which a long paroxysm of silent weeping enters into the business of the scene—not only may

be introduced by a modern actress, but is evidently intended by the poet? I cannot think of one. For instance, after the parting of Romeo and Juliet, what would be more natural, one may almost say inevitable, than that Juliet should throw herself down on her bed in tears? But it does not occur to Shakespeare. Probably there was no bed visible, the action passing behind the balustrade of the Upper Stage. There was nothing for Juliet to weep upon; and the gesture is an essential part of the effect. Shakespeare had to fall back upon words, and make her say:

> Oh, Fortune, Fortune, all men call thee fickle.
> If thou art fickle, what dost thou with him
> That is renown'd for faith?

—and so on. It is very pretty; but it is a makeshift forced upon the poet by the limits of his scenic convention.*

If, now, we pass from the question of technique to the doubtless more essential question of matter, of intellectual content, we must surely see that the drama of today is enormously ahead of that of the seventeenth century. Here, once more, of course, we must say "Shakespeare apart." Not that I think Shakespeare is to be reckoned a colossal intellect. It was not his business to be a great thinker. He was a totally different thing—namely a stupendous genius. No more than any of his contemporaries was he alive to the great idea which differentiates the present age from all that have gone before—the idea of progress. He was content to live in a stationary world. Neither in politics nor in philosophy was he at all in advance of his time. All this, however, is by the way: I fully admit that Shakespeare is out of the comparison. In sheer imaginative and creative power, he towers above our standards. But, Shakespeare apart, what playwright of his age would compare in point of intellect with half-a-dozen men who are now writing for the stage? Ben Jonson will, of course, be thrust into the breach, and it would be foolish to deny that Ben had a

*It may be said that Juliet must not give way to tears, since she knows that her mother is at the door; but if the poet had desired the effect of a burst of weeping, he could easily have postponed the announcement of Lady Capulet's approach.

robust mind. But does a single general idea emerge from his work? He was a vigorous satirist, scourging, by way of caricature, the follies of his age; but a thinker he was not.

Now look at the playwrights of today. Must we not recognise, in Mr. Bernard Shaw, one of the most brilliant intellects that ever found expression in dramatic form? I do not say that Mr. Shaw is a great dramatist, though at the beginning of his career it almost seemed that he might develop into one. In *Candida*, in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, in *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, there are passages of true dramatic invention and power. But on the whole, Mr. Shaw lacks the power of projection which marks the born dramatist. He cannot throw his characters outside himself. He cannot cut the umbilical cord that attaches them to him. To put it another way, his plays do not pass in the outside, objective world. The theatre is always within his own brain. One is tempted to call him a ventriloquist: but it may be said, with truth, that all drama is ventriloquism; the dramatist pulls the strings of his puppets, and speaks through their mouths. It is not enough, then, to say that Mr. Shaw is a ventriloquist: we must add that he is an imperfect ventriloquist, who actuates ingenious and amusing puppets, but can seldom or never disguise his own voice and accent. I know of no other playwright of eminence of whom this can so truly be said; and such a defect, or limitation, disconcerts criticism. It is very hard to "place" Mr. Shaw among other dramatists. He is something of a freak. But when we think of the array of brilliant comedies which we owe to him, we cannot but feel that, wherever he may stand in relation to others, he is in himself an indisputable man of genius, and that the essence of his genius is his superb intellectual vigour. In *John Bull's Other Island*, in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, in *Major Barbara*, he has extraordinarily enriched our literature. When one thinks of Broadbent and Keegan in *John Bull* and of B. B. (Bloomfield Bonnington) in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, one feels almost inclined to withdraw the statement that he cannot project character. *Man and Superman*, *Fanny's First Play*, and his later dialogues—they are scarcely plays—

from *Getting Married* onwards, I myself rank much below the three pieces which he produced for the historic Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre. But whatever definitions and reservations we may attach to our estimate of his genius, we cannot possibly deny his extraordinary vitality and vivacity of intellect. If criticism of life be indeed an essential of great comedy—and I think it is—here we have it in superabundance. His plays are not only relevant but dynamic. Assuredly they belong, not to the literature of charm, but to the literature of power. Yet they are not quite deficient in charm, even in poetry. In *Candida,* indeed, Mr. Shaw has done what many other dramatists have tried to do, and failed,—put on the stage a poet whom we feel to be *really* a poet.

Which of the lesser Elizabethans, or what three of them, shall we measure against Mr. Shaw in point of intellectual stature? The question is a sheer absurdity. Some of them —not all—are his superiors in one thing, and in that only: in the gift of writing verbal poetry.

Turn, now, to Mr. John Galsworthy—to the author of *The Silver Box, Strife* and *Justice.* Here are three masterly dramas, interesting, absorbing from end to end, without an over-emphatic word, a touch of caricature, or a line of appeal to any unworthy instinct or sentiment. They are intensely realistic, inasmuch as they are exact transcripts from life, yet there is nothing crude or repulsive about them. They are not great works of dramatic architecture—they are too simple and straightforward to merit that description—but every line shows a sensitive instinct for the peculiar art of the theatre. And while they are fine works of art, without any direct moralising or preaching, they are also works of profound humanity, invaluable stimulants to spiritual progress. Their moral is not tagged on to them like a label, but exhales from their whole structure. What can be more relevant to our national life than the demonstration in *Strife* of the waste and misery involved in obstinate trade disputes, due to the intense reluctance of certain classes of men to go out to meet the inevitable future? What can be more edu-

cative, more enlightening, more conducive to a humaner tone of thought, than the presentment, in *Justice*, of the brainless, soulless, automatic working of the huge machine we call the criminal law? Justice, we perceive, is not a divinity, but an ugly fetish; and it is not Mr. Galsworthy's fault, at any rate, if we are not attuned to sympathy with every effort to make her indeed the beneficent goddess of our ideal. In the great battle against cruelty, which is half, and more than half, of what we mean by progress, *Justice* is an achievement comparable with *The Trojan Women* of Euripides. However different in method and in key, it is, like the *Troades*, a haunting protest against man's inhumanity to man.

Where, in the works of the lesser Elizabethans, are we to find any parallel to these works of poignant interest, fine technical accomplishment, and flawless nobility of spirit? There is simply nothing of the same order of art. The whole atmosphere of what may be called domestic drama in the Elizabethan age—drama of contemporary life—is harsh, coarse and cruel. We have either savage satires, as in Jonson, Chapman and Marston's *Eastward Ho* and Massinger's *City Madam*, or cynical tales of debauchery, as in Middleton's *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* or Beaumont and Fletcher's *Scornful Lady*. Here and there a certain glimmer of humanitarian feeling is perceptible, as in Dekker's Bellafront plays, Ford and Dekker's *Witch of Edmonton*, or Heywood's *Woman Kill'd with Kindness;* but it is a very faint gleam, obscured by dense clouds of puerility, vulgarity and barbarism. It is, of course, no merit of Mr. Galsworthy's to live in the twentieth century, no crime of Dekker's or Heywood's to have lived in the seventeenth. But I submit that it was their ill-fortune to be born into a barbarous age, profoundly unconscious of its barbarism; and that it is our good fortune to live in an age which is keenly conscious of the survivals of barbarism which dishonour it, and to have in Mr. Galsworthy a masterly interpreter, in dramatic form, of these qualms of social conscience, which are the strongest guarantees of better things to come. The whole drift of my

argument is that we should give over the silly habit of talking of our own age as an age of dwarfs compared with the Elizabethan age of giants. Half a century ago, there was some excuse for such talk: today, it has become a mere anachronism. I say that a man like John Galsworthy is in intellectual and moral stature far above any of the lesser Elizabethans, while he is a master of a subtle and dexterous technique unimagined by the best of them, and indeed inapplicable to their rudimentary stage.

If I mention Mr. Granville Barker after Mr. Galsworthy, let it be remembered that I am not proceeding in any order of merit. The author of *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Waste* stands, in my eyes, second to none of his contemporaries. I am not sure that these are not the greatest plays of our time. I have just re-read them with unbounded, though not quite unqualified, admiration. Mr. Barker has, like the rest of us, his mannerisms, and one or two of them, I think, must be classed as imperfections. But detailed criticism is not my present business. I submit that, in *The Voysey Inheritance*, we have an English family group presented with a mastery of draughtsmanship and a depth of colour that remind us of a canvas of Rembrandt or Franz Hals, while at the same time the dramatic movement is sustained with subtle and original art. It may seem wildly paradoxical, but I am tempted to call Mr. Voysey—the old-established family solicitor, who lives in the odour of opulent respectability upon the systematic misappropriation of his clients' money—I am tempted to call him a modern edition of Ben Jonson's Volpone, of whom I spoke in my last lecture. He is Volpone reduced to human proportions and docked of his monstrous vices. I read to you last week Volpone's account of his system: here is Mr. Voysey's, delivered to his son and partner, Edward, who has just discovered the secret of his father's prosperity:

Mr. Voysey. My dear boy, you evidently haven't begun to grasp the A.B.C. of my position. What has carried me to victory? The confidence of my clients. What has earned that confidence? A decent life, my

integrity, my brains? No; my reputation for wealth—that, and nothing else. Business nowadays is run on the lines of the confidence-trick. What makes old George Booth so glad to trust me with every penny he possesses? Not affection—he never cared for anything in his life but his collection of prints. No, he imagines that I have as big a stake in the country, as he calls it, as he has, and he's perfectly happy.

Edward goes on exploring the old man's mind, and plunging into depth after depth of unscrupulousness. At last he says:

Edward. My dear Father—putting every moral question aside—it's all very well your playing Robin Hood in this magnificent manner; but have you given a moment's thought to the sort of inheritance you'll be leaving me?

Mr. Voysey. (*Pleased for the first time.*) Ah! that is a question you have every right to ask.

Edward. If you died tomorrow, could we pay eight shillings in the pound,—or seventeen—or five? Do you know?

Mr. Voysey. And my answer is that, by your help I have every intention, when I die, of leaving a will behind me of property to you all running into six figures. D'you think I've given my life and my talents to this money-making for a less result than that? I'm fond of you all—and I want you to be proud of me—and I mean that the name of Voysey shall be carried high in the world by my children and my grandchildren.

Mr. Voysey is as delicate a study in moral obliquity as any in literature.

Mr. John Robertson said last week that a champion of the Elizabethans might retort upon my strictures by saying, "Whatever the faults and crudities of the age they lived in, these men had at any rate the strength to produce tragedies —and that your moderns have not." To such an opponent I would reply quite simply, "You are out in your facts: the dramatists of today do not produce bloody melodramas, in which men's tongues are torn out on the stage and women die in agony of kissing poisoned prayer-books; but tragedies

they do produce, tragedies which bring home to us the pity and terror of life." Sir Arthur Pinero's *Iris* and *Mid-Channel* are tragedies of today; so is Mr. Barker's *Waste;* while Mr. John Masefield's *Nan* is a tragedy of yesterday. I have not time to say anything adequate of *Waste;* but simply to show that I am not presenting to you any merely personal estimate of Mr. Barker's powers, I will quote a few lines from Mr. A. B. Walkley's criticism of the play. It is, he says:

> a work of extraordinary power, dealing with some of the most fundamental facts of human life with unflinching truthfulness, and at the same time blending these facts with the most vivid presentation we have yet had on the English stage of great social and political questions.

Mr. Walkley is not a critic prone to extravagant enthusiasms. In these words he does not overstate the intellectual power of the play; and he does not touch upon its dramatic merits. I find it hard to express my sense of the sheer insignificance of the most lauded Elizabethan work—of, for instance, *The Maid's Tragedy, The Duchess of Malfy, The Broken Heart, Arden of Feversham* and *A Woman Kill'd with Kindness*—when compared with work so replete with observation, thought and subtle craftsmanship as this tragedy of modern life.

In a very different way, Mr. Masefield's *Nan* is quite as powerful. A rustic play dealing with primitive conditions of life, it enters more directly into competition with the Elizabethans—with such writers as Heywood, Dekker and Middleton—than the culture-plays with which I have just been dealing. And how far it out-distances them! Some of you may perhaps think that what is reckoned the supreme faculty of the Elizabethans—namely imagination—is absent from, or deficient in, the modern plays with which we have been dealing. I think that is a fallacy, an illusion; but at any rate no one can deny that *The Tragedy of Nan* is full of imagination in the Elizabethan sense of the word. And the imagination of Mr. Masefield's *Philip the King* is not so much Elizabethan as Greek. Swinburne, you remember,

compared Tourneur with Æschylus—surely the most monstrous critical aberration on record. But *Philip the King* has really an Æschylean touch about it. It is the *Persæ* of the modern world.

Philip the King is written, you remember, in rhyme, which has been familiarised to us on the stage by Professor Murray's beautiful translations of Euripides. It is impossible, in the time left to me, to say much more to the purpose as to the use of verse on the stage. I have suggested to you that the dominance of the blank-verse convention, and the consequent temptation to substitute rhetoric for natural human speech, was one of the misfortunes of the Elizabethan period. Does it follow that I would wish to see blank-verse entirely excluded from the modern drama? Not at all. Blank-verse—or even rhyme—is the predestined medium for purely fantastic plays, plays of Fairyland or of Cloud-Cuckoo-Land. I am no hide-bound realist, no æsthetic Gradgrind, who would deprecate or depreciate such plays. I believe there is ample room for them, if only our poets, instead of improvising on the Elizabethan model, would study the conditions of the modern theatre, and acquire some technical skill. And not only for fantastic, but for a certain order of historical plays, I regard blank-verse as an appropriate medium. It assists us in overcoming the language difficulty. When we get back to remote periods, there is an inevitable incongruity in making our characters speak modern prose; and what is known as Wardour-Street English only makes matters worse. We must create an atmosphere of convention, and in that blank-verse is helpful. It would be absurd to make Frederick the Great or Robespierre, Garibaldi or Bismarck talk blank-verse; but, on the other hand, if we wished to put Charlemagne, or Barbarossa, or Richard Cœur-de-Lion on the stage, it would be very hard to hit on a prose style that should not be either ludicrously trivial or more artificial than blank-verse. Ibsen, in writing *The Vikings* and *The Pretenders* in prose, was aided by the fact that the prose of the Old-Norse sagas, in which he found his themes, is admirably dramatic. I do not say, of course,

that an exceptionally fine artist might not make prose an acceptable medium for a play of any period. All I mean is that blank-verse is a legitimate aid towards creating and maintaining the requisite illusion of remoteness.

And now, at last, I must face the question whether all these analyses and discussions have in any way helped to supply the want to which I called your attention in my opening lecture—the want of a generally applicable standard of dramatic values. Certainly we have arrived at no brief formula—no pocket foot-rule wherewith to measure and size up, as it were, every drama we come across, of whatever nation or period. It does not follow, however, that our investigations have been fruitless. I hope we have caught glimpses of some principles which I will now very briefly summarise.

In the first place, the theatre of all ages is a machine devised, or rather developed, for the purpose of presenting to an assemblage of human beings imitations of human life, and thereby awakening a certain order of emotions which cannot be aroused in an equal degree by any other means. Now it will be admitted, I hope, by all reasonable people, as distinct from æsthetic paradox-mongers, that it is a merit in an imitation to resemble the thing imitated, and to be achieved by what may be called consistent and homogeneous methods, not by a confusion of planes, a jumbling of conventions. Greek tragedy was not a realistic, but a consistent, imitation. It dealt with a heroic past, which was quite legitimately, and even necessarily, conceived as steeped in "an ampler ether, a diviner air" than that of the real world. Its gods, its demi-gods and princes spoke, by their very nature, in rhythmic speech, rising in emotional crises into song; and their deeds and destinies were lyrically descanted on by an ideal populace, the Chorus. Nor was environment neglected. Even apart from movable features, the permanent skênê or background of the theatre was appropriate to the action of the great majority of the plays. It is true that exposition was generally accomplished by epic

methods, as in the Euripidean prologue; but, in the main, Greek tragedy was a pure as well as a noble art-form. So, in our own day, is Wagnerian music-drama. Of its musical merits I am not competent to speak, nor are they to the present purpose. The point is that, be the music good, bad or indifferent, it is the consistent, continuous atmosphere in which the personages live and move and have their being. The subject of the imitation is a non-existent but imaginable world in which all life is emotion and all emotion is expressed in tone, harmony and rhythm. Not so the old Italian opera. Here we had an impure form of imitation: we saw real people—Lucrezia Borgia, or Lucy Ashton, or even Dumas's Marguerite Gautier—moving on the common earth, but occasionally, by a gross convention which only habit rendered tolerable, bursting forth into a recitative and aria, a trio or a quartette. Now in the same way the Elizabethan drama was an impure, whereas the modern drama is a pure, form of imitation. Moreover the Elizabethan drama is praised by its eulogists mainly on the ground of its impurities—by which I mean, of course, not its improprieties, but the recitatives and arias which break the continuity of its texture and keep it shifting from plane to plane. I hope you will concede to me this principle; that a pure and consistent form of imitation is, other things being equal, better than a bastard form, and that the mechanism of the modern theatre which permits of a pure, consistent and complete imitation, is in so far a sign and symbol of real artistic progress.

"Other things being equal," I say; for of course it is always possible to use an imperfect mechanism and method nobly, a comparatively perfect mechanism trivially and ignobly. Genius transfigures whatever it touches, and Shakespeare transfigured the Elizabethan stage. Also I have frankly admitted that during the greater part of the nineteenth century English playwrights made no worthy use of the vastly improved mechanism at their command. Down to, say, 1890, therefore, the glorification of the Elizabethans, though always excessive, was at least excusable, inasmuch

as their work was distinctly less puerile than the average play of the period. But about 1890 (perhaps a little earlier) even that poor advantage of the Elizabethans—the advantage of being less puerile—began to be challenged. Our playwrights developed two capacities: first, that of using the mechanism of the theatre to achieve the maximum of specifically dramatic effect, of such effect as the theatre alone *can* achieve; second, that of producing imitations which were relevant to life, which had a rational and appreciable bearing upon philosophy or religion, upon morals or manners. This brings us, then, to two other principles which I hope you will accept: first, that high technical skill, the power of artfully, not artificially, arranging your matter so as to produce strong and concentrated, not weak and diffused, effects upon the emotions of your audience, is a good, and not a bad, thing; second, that it is good, and not bad,—in so far as you can do so without direct preaching, which is an artistic impurity—to give your audience something to think about, something that does not merely while away an idle hour for them, but becomes a part of their experience, stimulating their intelligence, deepening their insight, and enlarging their sympathies.

These principles are very roughly indicated, but I think they provide a fair working criterion of merit in drama. When you want to estimate a play, you ought, I think, to ask yourselves three questions:

First you should ask: Does it present a reasonably faithful imitation of what may be called the visible and audible surfaces of life, without intrusions or gross caricature, or shiftings from one plane of convention to another? So much, I think, we are entitled to demand of anything purporting to be serious drama. Plays which do not fulfil this requirement may be excellent farce or extravaganza—and for good farce and extravaganza I, for one, have the keenest relish—but serious drama they are not. I would have you note, however, that this demand does not rule out historic or purely poetic drama. We cannot, of course, reproduce the visible and audible surfaces of the past with the faith-

fulness which we can achieve in reproductions of the present; but we can adopt a convention and adhere to it in such a way as to beget that provisional belief, that imaginative acquiescence, which we call illusion in the theatre.

Then, secondly, you should ask this question: Is the story developed, and are the characters presented, in such a way as to make the best use of the mechanism of the theatre, and to beget in the audience, in high intensity, those emotions of growing interest, suspense, anticipation, sudden and vivid realisation, which it is the peculiar privilege of drama to produce? In other words: does the author show that intimate understanding of the potentialities of his medium which is the essence and meaning of technique?

If you can answer these two questions in the affirmative, you may safely pronounce the play to be, so far as it goes, a good one; but it may at the same time be artistically trivial and intellectually negligible. If it is to rank as a great play, you must be able to give an affirmative answer to the third question: Does the play *say* something and *mean* something? Has it a practical bearing either upon thought or conduct? In seeing or reading it, have we not merely enjoyed a pastime, but undergone an experience? Are we, in a word, intellectually the richer or morally the better for it? I think Aristotle, in saying that tragedy ought to purge our emotions, was formulating something very like this last demand.

If you can say "Yes" to all three questions, you may safely believe and assert that you have to do with a fine piece of dramatic literature. It is not always easy, of course, to apply these tests to drama so remote from us as that of the age of Elizabeth; but if it is sometimes hard to say whether a particular play *does* fulfil all the tests, it is often only too easy to perceive that it does not begin to fulfil any one of them.

One last word it may be wise to add. In maintaining that our living modern drama compares very favourably with the drama left to us by the lesser Elizabethans, I imply no extravagant eulogy. I fully admit that we have no Shake-

speare, no Ibsen, perhaps not even a Hauptmann or a D'Annunzio. I think the new dramatic movement is only at its beginning, and I have the liveliest hopes for its further development. Who knows what genius may even now be ripening, perhaps at Oxford or Cambridge, perhaps in a coal-mine, a factory, or, like Ibsen, in a drug-store? But of one thing I am sure: that we shall never call into being a drama worthy of England's greatness if we persist in a superstitious over-estimate of the drama of the past and an ignorant depreciation of the drama of the present.

THE RESTORATION TO THE RENASCENCE

VI

The Restoration, in a very real sense, marks an epoch in the history of English drama, but not quite in the sense which the manuals of literature are apt to suggest. We are commonly given to understand that the closing of the theatres during the Civil War caused a sudden and complete break in the dramatic movement which had set in with Marlowe, Greene and Peele some sixty years earlier, and that a totally new start was made in 1660, under the predominant and deleterious influence of France. In a literary sense, this is almost wholly untrue, and no serious student of the Restoration drama could possibly make such a mistake. "The later period," says Sir Adolphus Ward,* "derived the best and truest part of its vitality from the earlier"—and the statement is absolutely incontestable, except in so far as one might beg leave to substitute the epithet "most characteristic" for "best and truest." Ben Jonson was the paramount influence—to my thinking a disastrous one—in the comedy of the early years of the Restoration.† Both in comedy and in tragedy, the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher and of Massinger was very strong. Middleton and Shirley had their imitators. Never, in short, did one period derive more directly from another than did the Restoration period from the Jacobean and Caroline.

John Richard Green, then, goes enormously astray when he tells us that "the comedy of the Restoration borrowed everything from the comedy of France save the poetry, the delicacy and the good taste which veiled its grossness."

*_English Dramatic Literature_, Vol III, p. 331.

†Shadwell, in the preface to _The Sullen Lovers_ (1668) says: "I have endeavoured to represent variety of humours . . . which was the practice of Ben Jonson, whom I think all dramatic poets ought to imitate, though none are like to come near." Tom Davies, however, (_Dramatic Miscellanies_, Chap. XXIV) makes out that the vogue of Jonson was factitious, and that he was never really popular. "He was never supported," says Davies, "by the public voice, though kept alive by the critics and the excellent performance of the actors. . . . Some of our leading nobility, and other court critics, made it their business to stimulate the players to revive their favourite author, though, I am persuaded, the greatest part of the audiences had no appetite for him." Convincing evidence of these statements would now be hard to adduce; but probability is all on their side.

"Veiled its grossness," forsooth! Where did Mr. Green find grossness in the seventeenth-century comedy of France? It uses a few expressions, no doubt, which have become obsolete in modern speech; and it refers to certain subjects which are to this day more freely spoken of in France than in England. But if there is anything that can fairly be called "gross" in French comedy of the age of Molière, it must occur in the works of obscure playwrights who have escaped my observation. But Green was only repeating an accepted commonplace. Thackeray had stated it more vivaciously, but even less justly, when he said: "She was a disreputable, daring, laughing, painted French baggage, that Comic Muse. She came over from the Continent with Charles at the Restoration—a wild, dishevelled Laïs, with eyes bright with wit and wine." I think it is high time that this off-hand theory were set down as what it is—a libel on France. The truth is that the comedy of the Restoration borrowed nothing from the comedy of France, except a few plots which it clumsily vulgarised and distorted.* The most important literary influence of the French drama upon the English must be sought in the rhymes of the so-called "heroic plays." But even this influence was felt, so to speak, only at the end of the couplets. Neither in construction nor in substance did these plays owe anything to Corneille—to his maturer works at any rate—or to Racine. In so far as they could trace their lineage to France at all, it was to French romance, not to French drama.

If, then, the new birth of English drama under the malign influence of France be a myth of the manuals, in what sense does the Restoration mark an epoch? In the sense that 1660 may be set down, with sufficient accuracy for all practical purposes, as the birth-year, on the one hand, of the modern theatre, and, on the other hand, of modern Society. If I am right in regarding the development of drama as a process of perfecting the element of Imitation, and gradually extruding the element of lyrical and exaggerative Passion, we

*Compare, for instance, Otway's *Cheats of Scapin* or Mrs. Centlivre's *Gamester* with their gay and sparkling French originals.

cannot but attach crucial importance to the provision, on the one hand, of an instrument which rendered faithful imitation possible, and on the other hand, of forms of social life which lent themselves to faithful imitation.

There was, indeed, no absolute breach of continuity even in the development of the theatre as a machine. The playhouse of the Restoration, with its apron stage partly enclosed by oblique proscenium walls, each pierced by a door with a balconied window over it, reproduced almost exactly (there is every reason to believe) the forward portion of the Elizabethan stage. The great difference was that the proscenium now became a perfect arch, and that everything behind it could be shut off by a large curtain. In the Elizabethan theatre only a comparatively small Rear Stage or alcove could be curtained, with the result that there was no scenery, or only (and quite by exception) such rudimentary "perspectives" as could be placed on this Rear Stage. Now, with the proscenium arch forming a picture-frame, locality could be, and habitually was, indicated by painted and readily movable scenes. It is true that the actors constantly stepped out of the picture-frame and acted upon the projecting apron, which has finally disappeared only within our own memory.* But an enormous stride was made when it became the habit to place each episode of the action against its appropriate visual background. Side walls, indeed, might be indicated by a series of painted "wings," and the books of a library, or even the furniture of a drawing-room, might simply be painted on a back cloth. But the great thing was that environment was suggested to the eye, not merely to the imagination. As soon as that became the established practice, it was only a matter of time to reach the minutely faithful reproductions of environment, in all its dimensions, with which we are now familiar, and against which, indeed, a certain reaction has set in.

With the Restoration, too, the theatre became definitely a theatre and not merely an adapted inn-yard. It was once for all roofed in, and performances were given exclusively

*And not even yet in opera-houses.

by artificial light.* It may seem at first sight as though this were a retrogression, a falsification. "For the faithful imitation of daylight scenes," it may be said, "was not daylight preferable?" But the answer is not far to seek. In the mimic world created by art, everything should be under the artist's control; and "real" daylight, even if it could be conveniently introduced into the playhouse, would be a rebellious and incongruous element. It would be as though a portrait-painter, instead of painting a lady's dress, should paste real silk upon his canvas.

But the great step in advance lay, of course, in the assignment of female parts to women instead of to boys. I need not enlarge on the immense significance of this reform.

At the Restoration, too, Society, in the drawing-room sense of the word, attained self-consciousness. "The Upper Ten," to use a somewhat obsolete phrase, came into existence. A large number of people, owning similar conventions, similar shibboleths, similar tastes and prejudices, congregated in the Court end of the town; and the theatre became a habitual rendezvous for these people. The modern age may truly be said to have come in with the introduction of tea, coffee and chocolate. The coffee-house was the progenitor of the modern club; the tea-table became the altar of the domestic gods. Drunkenness was still disgracefully prevalent; but it was possible for social intercourse to centre around something less inflammatory than the punch-bowl, and to find stimulus in beverages which cheered but not inebriated.

In a homogeneous, self-conscious Society, then, which loved (and paid) to see itself depicted on the boards, there existed for the first time the material for a true social comedy—a sober and sincere imitation of manners and character. The Restoration dramatists made questionable, and in some ways deplorable, use of their opportunity; but the opportunity was there, and was a new thing.

Before discussing comedy, however, it may be well to glance at the tragedy, or at any rate, the non-mirthful drama,

*Though the hour of opening was as early as half-past three, I am not aware of any evidence for daylight performances after the Restoration.

of the period, and consider why it is that, though one man of genius and several men of talent devoted themselves to this branch of literature, they produced nothing which has survived in the sense in which the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, or of Goethe and Schiller, may be said to survive. Not only are these plays constantly acted in the theatres of France and Germany respectively; but every educated man, the world over, has a certain knowledge of them, or at the very least would be ashamed to confess that he had none. The plays of Dryden, Lee and Otway, on the other hand, are absolutely dead, except for professed students and antiquarians. What educated Englishman would blush to confess that he had never read *The Conquest of Granada,* or that *Venice Preserved* was only a name to him? They are much more extinct than even the better plays of the minor Elizabethans. What is it that has relegated them to the lumber-room?

We must not forget that several of these productions had a long life on the stage. The heroic play, indeed,—that is to say the tragedy or romance in rhymed couplets—scarcely survived the generation which witnessed its birth. According to the index to Genest's History of the Stage, Dryden's *Aurung-Zebe* was last performed in 1721, and his *Conquest of Granada* in 1709; while the previous year, 1708, had seen the last performance of Otway's *Don Carlos.* Several of the blank-verse plays, on the other hand, were constantly acted for well over a century. People are probably alive today who have seen *Venice Preserved* performed, not merely as an antiquarian curiosity, but as a part of the living repertory. Dryden's *All for Love* survived, according to Genest, until 1818, Otway's *Orphan* until 1815, Lee's *Theodosius* until 1797, and his *Rival Queens* until 1823.

Though *Aurung-Zebe* is doubtless a somewhat better play, *The Conquest of Granada* remains, in virtue of its impetuous vigour—nay, of its very extravagances—the typical play of its species. It can be read to this day with pleasure, and it would be very curious to see it acted—the ten acts of its two parts being, perhaps, compressed into five. One can

readily understand that a poet who could handle the heroic couplet as Dryden did should find blank-verse a flat and tedious medium—as, indeed, it is, except in the hands of genius. But if ever there was a play in which the sober imitation of life is swamped and drowned in lyrical bombast, this is assuredly it. The poet himself tells us whence he drew his inspiration.* He was one day reflecting, he says, upon "what was wanting to the perfection" of Davenant's *Siege of Rhodes*, "which was design and variety of characters." Then he goes on:

> In the midst of this consideration, by mere accident, I opened the next book that lay by me, which was an Ariosto in Italian; and the very first two lines of that poem gave me light to all I could desire:
>
> Le donne, i cavalier, l'arme, gli amori,
> Le cortesie, l'audaci imprese io canto, etc.
>
> For the very next reflection which I made was this: that an heroic play ought to be an imitation, in little, of an heroic poem; and consequently that love and valour ought to be the subject of it.

This is as much as to say that he set out with an epic, not a dramatic, ideal; and it was a romantic epic, not a drama, that he wrote. The action does not begin, develop, culminate, and conclude, but consists of a series of incidents, like beads upon a string, which might be continued to infinity, the only limit being the patience of the audience. There is what Marryat called "a triangular duel of three" going on all the time: the Christian Spaniards are fighting the Moors, and the two Moorish factions, the Zegrys and the Abencerrages, are fighting each other. The main plot is concerned with the hero, Almanzor, who carries victory wherever he goes, and shifts from side to side as one party after another offends him. For, as he says, he owes no allegiance to any one:

> I am as free as nature first made man,
> Ere the base laws of servitude began,
> When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

There are three separate love-stories: the rivalry of Alman-

*Essay of *Heroic Plays* prefixed to *The Conquest of Granada*.

zor and Boabdelin for the saintly Almahide; the rivalry of Abdalla and Abdelmelech for the far from saintly Lyndaraxa; and the loves of Ozmyn and Benzayda, thwarted by the enmity between their houses. The peripeties, the changes of fortune, are innumerable, but they involve no ingenuity, or mental exertion of any sort, on the poet's part—he simply, at his own sweet will, assigns victory to one or other of the parties which are for ever warring behind the scenes, or else attributes some wild psychological vagary to one or other of his characters. The be-all and end-all of the play is rant, or, to use Dryden's own word, rodomontade. Inflated and musical expression, whether of rage or rapture, of passion or of despair, is the one thing really aimed at. To that all other considerations yield. As simile was an indispensable ornament of the epic, so every scene of the heroic play must be gemmed with similes. Almost the only specifically dramatic feature of the type is the boastful or defiant epigram, which, when clinched with a rhyme, could be underlined by an attitude—an art in which Victor Hugo was, long afterwards, to excel.

Let me substantiate these remarks by a few quotations.

A good example of the epigram occurs at Almanzor's first appearance. The two factions of the Zegrys and the Abencerrages stand "ready to engage," when "Almanzor enters between them," with the remark:

> I cannot stay to ask which cause is best;
> But this is so to me, because opprest—

and therewith he joins the weaker party. Having in the same scene defied King Boabdelin, he is within an ace of losing his life:

> *Boabdelin.* (*To his guards.*) Away, and execute him instantly.
> *Almanzor.* Stand off; I have not leisure yet to die.

Imagine the magnificent gesture with which an actor of the palmy days would speak this line!

The similes are so abundant that one scarcely knows how to select from them. Here is one of Almanzor's:

My heart's so plain
That men on every passing thought may look,
Like fishes gliding in a crystal brook;
When troubled most, it does the bottom show,
'Tis weedless all above, and rockless all below.

Now listen to Almahide:

My soul is soft, which you may gently lay
In your loose palm; but, when 'tis pressed to stay,
Like water it deludes your grasp and slips away.

The usurper Abdalla falls wounded before the sword of Abdelmelech, and solaces his dying moments with a simile:

Abdelmelech. Now ask your life.
Abdalla. 'Tis gone; that busy thing,
The soul, is packing up, and just on wing,
Like parting swallows, when they seek the spring:
Like them, at its appointed time, it goes,
And flies to countries more unknown than those.

The most famous simile, however, is this of Almahide's:

So, two kind turtles, when a storm is nigh,
Look up, and see it gathering in the sky:
Each calls his mate to shelter in the groves,
Leaving, in murmur, their unfinished loves:
Perched on some drooping branch, they sit alone
And coo, and hearken to each other's moan.

What is this but an aria in good set form, as remote from sober imitation of life as anything in Italian opera? It is not even a psychologically probable thought, artificially heightened in the expression. It does not belong to Almahide's character, in so far as she can be said to have a character at all, but is an incongruous, almost an irrelevant, ornament. Even in its own age, its absurdity was too flagrant to pass unnoticed, and the Duke of Buckingham thus parodied it in *The Rehearsal:*

So boar and sow, when any storm is nigh,
Snuff up, and smell it gathering in the sky;
Boar beckons sow to trot in chestnut groves,
And there consummate their unfinished loves;

Pensive in mud, they wallow all alone,
And snore and gruntle to each other's moan.

But the most characteristic features of *The Conquest of Granada* are, after all, the sheer rants. When Almanzor has quarrelled with the Zegrys, the usurping King Abdalla thus addresses him:

Your boldness to your services I give;
Now take it as your full reward—to live.

Whereupon Almanzor replies:

To live!
If from thy hands alone my death can be,
I am immortal, and a god to thee.
If I would kill thee now, thy fate's so low,
That I must stoop ere I can give the blow:
But mine is fixed so far above thy crown
That all thy men,
Piled on thy back, can never pull it down.
But at my ease thy destiny I send
By ceasing from this hour to be thy friend.
Like heaven, I need but only to stand still,
And, not concurring in thy life, I kill.
Thou canst no title to my duty bring;
I'm not thy subject, and my soul's thy king.
Farewell. When I am gone,
There's not a star of thine dare stay with thee:
I'll whistle thy tame fortune after me;
And whirl fate with me wheresoe'er I fly,
As winds drive storms before them in the sky.

This is pretty tall talk; but at the end of the next act, where he parts from Almahide, the hero soars to a still higher pitch. He says:

Born, as I am, still to command, not sue,
Yet you shall see that I can beg for you;
And if your father will require a crown,
Let him but name the kingdom, 'tis his own.
I am, but while I please, a private man;
I have that soul which empires first began.
From the dull crowd which every king does lead
I will pick out whom I will choose to head;
The bravest and best souls I can select,
And on their conquered necks my throne erect.

One is reminded of that saying of Jack Poyntz in Robertson's *School* which so excited Ruskin's indignation: "Othello was a nigger, and didn't mind bragging." But Almanzor is a Moor only by adoption. He is really (as his mother's apparition informs him, and as a strawberry-mark on his left arm confirms) the son of the Duke of Arcos, one of the noblest grandees of Spain. After ten acts of strutting and swaggering under the Crescent, he becomes a champion of the Cross, and is rewarded with the hand of the now widowed Almahide.

It is evident that Passion, violent mental excitation, expressed in outrageously inflated terms, is the inspiration and the aim of such drama as this. It is much further from sober Imitation than the better sort of Elizabethan drama. It out-Herods Herod, it out-Tamburlaines Tamburlaine. And *The Conquest of Granada* far excels the average play of its time in talent. With all its faults, it is the work of a great man—so great that, when he wearied of rhyme, and reverted to blank-verse, he produced a reading of the Antony and Cleopatra tragedy not wholly unworthy to be named beside Shakespeare's. *All for Love, or The World Well Lost,* is in my judgment by far the greatest and sanest tragic play of its age. Its style tends, indeed, towards bombast, but rarely oversteps the limit of the conceivable. And it contains, what is almost unique in this period, a really fine dramatic invention. After Antony has been reconciled to Octavia, the bluff old Ventidius, his better genius, thinks that it will complete the breach between him and Cleopatra if his friend Dolabella becomes her lover. But the eunuch Alexas, Cleopatra's prime minister, is a deeper psychologist than the simple-minded soldier. He knows that jealousy, far from completing Antony's alienation from Cleopatra, is the very thing to revive his passion for her; so that he, too, welcomes the appearance of an amour between Cleopatra and Dolabella, while his motive is exactly opposed to that of Ventidius. Dryden does not seem quite to have realised what an admirable dramatic conjuncture he had hit upon. He does not work it out with sufficient clearness: he

ought to have made Alexas actually encourage and confirm Ventidius in his illusion. But the idea is there, even if it be inadequately handled; and it is the idea of a true dramatist. On the other hand, the meeting between Cleopatra and Octavia is a great mistake. French criticism, says Dryden in his preface, would have considered any such encounter a gross impropriety, and he defends it, with justice, against that conventional objection. But not only French criticism, but any rational system of technique, would demand that if the rivals were to be brought face to face, their colloquy should be intensely dramatic and should sensibly affect the course of the action. Dryden's scene fulfils neither of these demands. It is short and commonplace, and it leads to nothing. Sir Walter Scott, in condemning it, showed a truer instinct than Professor Saintsbury, who takes up its defence; but neither critic sees the true—the technical—ground of objection.

Rant and rodomontade were the all-pervading and inevitable vices of the rhymed heroic play. If you want another specimen, take this from Otway's *Don Carlos*—a speech addressed by the Queen of Spain to her jealous husband, Philip II:

> Had I been man, and had an impious wife,
> With speedy fury I'd have snatched her life;
> Torn a broad passage open to her heart,
> And there have ransacked each polluted part;
> Triumphed and laughed to have seen the issuing flood,
> And wantonly have bathed my hands in blood.

And this lady, be it remarked, is not a noted termagant, but a sympathetic heroine!

But though Dryden returned to sanity in returning to blank-verse, this was not the case with the lesser men. Lee and Otway saw in tragedy nothing but a vehicle for robustious declamation and melodious, languishing pathos. When I say "melodious" I refer to their intention rather than their achievement, for their command of melody is very slight. Let us take as an example *The Rival Queens*, by Nathaniel Lee.

Lee is treated by orthodox—or shall we say traditional?—criticism with a positively touching tenderness. Sir Adolphus Ward, for instance, finds that his tragedies "discover noble if not rare gifts," and, while admitting, with Dryden, that all his characters are "stark raging mad," nevertheless holds that "his frenzy is the frenzy of a poet," and metes out grave approval to a good deal of his work. Surely the plain truth is that the man was not only mad, but afflicted with a very disagreeable form of madness. His brain, indeed, teemed with images; but if there is a single just and pleasing—not to say dramatically appropriate—image in his writings, it has escaped my observation. Of specifically dramatic talent, in any sane sense of the term, he had very little. Two of his plays, *Theodosius* and *Constantine the Great*, do, indeed, contain striking scenes handled with a certain force; but there is no sustained constructive power in either play. In the first act of *Theodosius* he seems carefully to lead up to what might have been a very fine situation, and then he as carefully ignores it. Massinger had treated the same theme in one of the poorest of his plays, *The Emperor of the East*, but Lee's play is very much inferior even to Massinger's. After a course of Lee, one begins to "think nobly" of the minor Elizabethans. It is true that one of the plays to which Lee put his name is held by Sir Adolphus Ward to be "constructed with no ordinary skill," while a particular situation in it strikes him as among "the most effective . . . in the modern drama." These eulogies, applied to Lee and Dryden's *Œdipus*, are in themselves very just; but as the merit both of the general construction and of the particular situation belongs entirely to Sophocles, it is hard to see why it should be placed to the credit of his adaptors.

In *The Rival Queens*, says Sir Adolphus Ward,* "Lee achieved a work which was splendidly successful, and which deserves to live. The subject of this tragedy is the jealousy conceived by Alexander's first wife, the passionate and vindictive Roxana, against his second, the mild and gentle

*English Dramatic Literature, Vol. III, p. 409.

Statira; and, stirring in itself, this theme is indisputably here treated not only with great dramatic skill, but with considerable poetic power. There is no reason for denying," the critic continues, "that passages in *The Rival Queens* exhibit the bombast to which Lee inclined"; but he confesses himself "unable to read this tragedy without genuine admiration for the fervour which hurries it irresistibly along its impetuous course."

As it survived on the stage all contemporary tragedies except *Venice Preserved*, it may fairly be regarded as one of the masterpieces of its period. Let us, then, examine a little into its "great dramatic skill" and "considerable poetic power."

In the first place we have to note that though the contest of the Rival Queens is certainly the main theme of the play, at least half of the time of action is devoted to three subsidiary episodes which have no essential connection with that theme.

First we have the rivalry of Lysimachus and Hephestion for the hand of Parisatis. Alexander, siding with Hephestion, orders Lysimachus to be handed over, unarmed, to the tender mercies of a hungry lion; whereupon, we are told, Lysimachus plunged his hand into the monster's mouth:

> And, with *Herculean* force, tore forth by th' roots
> The foaming, bloody tongue; and while the Savage,
> Faint with that loss, sunk to the blushing Earth
> To plough it with his teeth, your conquering Souldier
> Leap'd on his back, and dashed his skull to pieces.

This exploit restores Lysimachus to Alexander's favour, so that the episode ends happily for all, except the lion. It is true that Hephestion presently drinks himself to death, but we do not gather that his disappointment in love has anything to do with his "surfeit."

The second episode has a direr issue. Clytus, Alexander's Master of the Horse, gets drunk and talks with uncourtly candour to the no less intoxicated monarch, who seizes a javelin and transfixes him with it. To this scene we owe the always-misquoted line

When Greeks joyn'd Greeks, then was the tug of War!

The character of Clytus and his fate have no bearing whatsoever upon the main theme.

Thirdly and lastly, the death of Alexander himself is a mere episode. Throughout the play there wanders a gang of conspirators plotting his assassination, and at last they determine to poison him at a banquet. That they carry out this scheme we know, for he dies of the poison; but, though we assist at the banquet, we do not in the least know when the poison is administered. Now it is surely a rudimentary point of dramatic policy that, if a murder is to be committed in sight of the audience, our attention should in some way be called to the act. But a more serious defect of craftsmanship is the omission to bring the death of Alexander into any sort of relation to the contest between his two wives. The fact that it occurs immediately after the death of Statira is a pure coincidence. There are a score of ways in which the rivalry of the Queens might have influenced or determined the murder, thus linking it up with the main emotional process. As it is, the play has two unconnected catastrophes, which somehow chance to synchronise. If Othello, instead of taking his own life in expiation of his crime, had been murdered by a gang of discontented Cypriotes, what should we have said of Shakespeare's dramatic skill?

Now as to the Queens themselves. In the first act Statira, hearing that Alexander has returned to his former love and renewed relations with Roxana, binds herself by horrid oaths to retire from the world and never to see his face again. She is deaf to the remonstrances of her mother and sister; but, to show there is no ill-feeling, she says, at the end of the scene:

> When to my purpos'd loneness I retire
> Your sight I through the Grates shall oft desire,
> And after *Alexander's* health enquire.

Could anything be more affecting?

In the second act Statira's mother and sister appear before

Alexander to break to him the news of her "purpos'd loneness." Observing their downcast mien, he exclaims:

> How fares my Love? Ha, neither answer me!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Trembling, and horrour, pierce me cold as Ice.
> Is she not well? what, none, none answer me?
> Or is it worse? Keep down, ye rising Sighs,
> And murmur in the hollow of my Breast:
> Run to my Heart, and gather more sad Wind;
> That, when the voice of Fate shall call you forth,
> Ye may, at one rush, from the Seat of Life
> Blow the Blood out, and burst me like a Bladder.

This, I suppose, is an example of "poetic power."

At last Hephestion summons up courage to tell the dreadful news:

> Your Queen *Statira* took it so to heart,
> That, in the Agony of Love, she swore
> Never to see your Majesty again.
> With dreadful Imprecations she confirm'd
> The Oath, and I much fear that she will keep it.
> *Alexander.* Ha! did she swear? Did that sweet Creature swear?
> I'll not believe it!

In the third act (for things move slowly at the court of Babylon) Roxana encounters Statira on the very threshold of her nunnery. Now one would suppose that the last thing Roxana would do would be to place any obstacle in the way of her self-effacement. She would stand aside in silence, or, if she must say anything, it would be to give crafty encouragement to her rival's resolve. What she actually does is to taunt and triumph over Statira in such an intolerable (and, incidentally, preposterous) fashion that oaths are thrown to the wind, and Statira resolves to resume her empire over Alexander. It is true, no doubt, that a furious woman is not to be restrained by reason, and is quite capable of gratifying her spite at the expense of her own interests. It would not have needed much technical skill or psychological subtlety to make us conceive that Roxana should at this point do something to mar her own triumph.

But Lee knows nothing of skill or subtlety. He makes Roxana taunt Statira as though she were not withdrawing of her own free will, but had been disdained and dismissed by Alexander—in other words, he makes her act with unexplained and inexplicable folly. The inevitable result ensues: Statira renounces her oath and resolves to see Alexander again. At first, however, she declines to receive him again as her husband; whereupon the mighty Macedonian thus expresses himself:

> O I shall burst
> Unless you give me leave to rave a while.*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Yes, I will shake this *Cupid* from my arms,
> If all the rages of the Earth can fright him;
> Drown him in the deep bowl of *Hercules;*
> Make the World drunk, and then like *Æolus,*
> When he gave passage to the struggling winds,
> I'll strike my Spear into the reeling Globe
> To let it bloud; set *Babylon* in a blaze
> And drive this God of flames with more consuming fire.

Statira then says:

> My presence will but force him to extremes. . . .
> Permit me to remove.

Then Alexander:

> I charge ye stay her,
> For if she pass, by all the Hells I feel,
> Your Souls, your naked Ghosts shall wait upon her.
> O turn thee! Turn! thou barb'rous brightness, turn!
> Hear my last words, and see my utmost pang:
> But first kneel with me, all my Souldiers kneel,
> (*All kneel.*)
> Yet lower—prostrate to the Earth:—Ah Mother, what,
> Will you kneel too? Then let the sun stand still,
> To see himself out-worship'd! not a face
> Be shown, that is not wash'd all o'er in tears.

At sight of the prostrate and weeping army, Statira relents and runs to Alexander's arms. How he then raves may be better imagined than described. He invites his whole army,

*Compare Otway's Caius Marius: "I will, but, prithee, let me rave a little." *The Rival Queens* preceded *Caius Marius* by three years.

as a reward for their timely tears, to dine with him that evening:

> I invite you all
> My equals in the Throne as in the Grave,
> Without distinction to the Riot come,
> To the King's Banquet . . .

Unfortunately he is too much occupied in rioting to look after Statira's safety, though he knows that the rabid Roxana is at large in the palace. Without the slightest difficulty, the rejected sultana penetrates to her rival's chamber and stabs her. To Alexander, arriving a moment too late, Statira says:

> Spare Roxana's life;
> 'Twas Love of you that caus'd her give me death.
> And, O sometimes amidst your Revels think
> Of your poor Queen, and, ere the cheerful Bowl
> Salute your lips, crown it with one rich tear,
> And I am happy. (*Dies.*)

Then Alexander and Roxana rave at each other for some time; but in obedience to Statira's behest, he spares her life. She goes off, remarking that after death she will "pursue his spotted ghost, and shoot him as he flies!"—a sportsmanlike aspiration. Meanwhile the effects of the poison he has imbibed at the banquet begin to tell upon him; and, to crown his sorrows, a courtier announces to him that:

> Your dear *Hephestion*, having drank too largely
> At your last Feast, is of a surfeit dead.

Having ordered Hephestion's doctor to be crucified, he returns to Statira's side and bursts out (not without an anticipatory reminiscence of *Antony and Cleopatra**):

> In this dear body my Banner's lost,
> My Standard Triumph's gone!
> Oh when shall I be mad? Give order to
> The Army that they break their Shields, Swords, Spears
> Pound their bright Armour into dust away. . . .
> Burn all the Spires that seem to kiss the Skies;

*Oh wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fall'n.

Beat down the Battlements of every City;
And for the Monument of this loved Creature,
Root up those Bowers, and pave 'em all with Gold:
Draw dry the Ganges, make the Indies poor;
To build her Tomb, no Shrines or Altars spare,
But strip the shining Gods to make it rare. (*Exit.*)

The delirium of his death I spare you: it comes almost as an anticlimax after the deliriums of his life.

Apart from its gross untruth, its remoteness from life and nature, what strikes one in *The Rival Queens,* as in the whole literature it represents, is its utter vulgarity of feeling. A sentiment or an image may be wholly unnatural, and yet may be agreeable, beautiful, a thing which we can dwell on with pleasure. But in Restoration tragedy a pleasing sentiment is almost as rare as a natural one. Take, for instance, Statira's dying prayer to Alexander, that in his revels, ere he puts the cheerful bowl to his lips, he will weep into it "one rich tear" in memory of her. Lee probably regarded this merely as a poetic way of requesting that he should remember her even in his pleasures; but what a grotesque symbol to choose! What defence can there be for an image that cannot be visualised without absurdity? And who can with gravity picture Alexander squeezing "one rich tear" into his punch bowl?*

*A few further specimens of Lee's style may not be without interest. Britannicus, in *Nero,* thus apostrophises his dead sister, Octavia:

Trust me, thy Sweetness I shall ne'er forget;
Stiff with my Sorrows, on thy Tomb I'll sit,
Till I at last into cold Marble turn,
And with my pious Figure grace thy Urn.

Hannibal, in *Sophonisba,* talks of

dreadful Cannae
Where the dire Sisters bit the *Roman* Looms,
As if their Hands were tired with cutting Dooms.

In *Lucius Junius Brutus,* Lee thus interprets the emotion of a devoted husband on witnessing his wife's suicide:

Lucrece. Revenge me; oh Revenge, Revenge, Revenge!
Lucretius. (*Her father.*) Struck to the Heart, already motionless.
Collatinus. (*Her husband.*) Oh give me way t'embalm her with my tears.

Can frigid insincerity go further? In the same play, after Titus has been flogged, and while he is being led to execution, Teraminta aspires

To wash thy Gashes with my farewell Tears . . .
To suck thy Wounds, and bubble out my Soul.

Cæsar Borgia contains some masterpieces of rant: for instance, Bellamira's denunciation of Borgia:

Seize him, you Fiends, and Furies damn him, damn him;
May Hell have infinite Stories, and this Devil
Be damned beneath the bottomless Foundation.

Take also these remarks of the poisoned Ascanio:

I burn, I burn, I roast, I roast, and my Guts fry,
They blaze, they snap, they bounce like Squibs and Crackers.

Otway, however, not Lee, is the acknowledged master of Restoration pathos. What are we to say of the dramas which kept his fame alive for a century and a half, and are still warmly praised by critics of high authority?

The Orphan need not long detain us. Its plot is devoid of common sense. Castalio and Polydore, twin sons of a Bohemian nobleman, are tenderly devoted to each other. Monimia, an orphan girl, daughter of their father's dearest friend, has been taken into the household as their father's ward. She has a brother, Chamont, a distinguished soldier; but as he appears in the play only to bluster and produce no effect, we can afford to forget him. One would have thought that Monimia's position in their father's house would have guaranteed her against any loose designs, and even any cynical talk, on the part of the brothers, who, be it noted, are presented to us as more or less sympathetic characters. In the second scene of the play, however, this passage occurs between them:

Polydore. I doat upon Monimia.
Castalio. Love her still.
Win and enjoy her.
Polydore. Both of us cannot.
Castalio. No matter
Whose chance it prove; but let's not quarrel for it.
Polydore. You would not wed Monimia, would you?
Castalio. Wed her!
No, were she all desire could wish, as fair
As would the vainest of her sex be thought—

and so forth. Now, in this Castalio is quite purposelessly lying. He loves Monimia passionately and honourably; and he proceeds to marry her secretly. For this secrecy there is no reason whatever; no one opposes or would oppose the marriage; and if it be said that he wants to spare Polydore's feelings, the excuse is sheer imbecility. The secret was bound to come out; and in the meantime he leaves his wife exposed to Polydore's dishonourable advances, which he has himself encouraged. What actually happens is that Polydore, knowing nothing of the marriage, learns that Cas-

talio has a nocturnal assignation with Monimia, and contrives to substitute himself for his brother on the marriage night. I need not pursue the nauseous plot any further. It is founded on Castalio's inexplicable folly, developed through Polydore's mediæval blackguardism, and culminates in the usual barn-storming rants. Here, as a specimen, is Polydore's utterance of his remorse:

> I'll find some place where adders nest in winter,
> Loathsome and venomous; where poisons hang,
> Like gums, against the walls; where witches meet
> By night, and feed upon some pampered imp,
> Fat with the blood of babes; there I'll inhabit,
> And live up to the height of desperation.

This is the great aim in life of all the heroes of the period —they are one and all determined to "live up to the height of desperation."

What, now, of *Venice Preserved?* Let us hear Mr. Edmund Gosse* upon it. "As we all know," he says, "it is simply the greatest tragic drama between Shakespeare and Shelley"—a judgment which it would be idle to dispute, though I think it does some injustice to Massinger, to Dryden, and even, perhaps, to Rowe. "Out of the dead waste of the Restoration . . ." Mr. Gosse proceeds, "this one solitary work of supreme genius rose unexpected and unimitated." In what sense the critic uses the last word it is hard to understand. I should rather have said that *Venice Preserved* was the great exemplar of half the dead tragedies of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, it is, in Mr. Gosse's eyes,

> a noble and solid masterpiece . . . the poetic element is always severely subordinated to the dramatic . . . All is designed for the true home of the drama, the stage; and without being in the least stagey, this theatrical aim is carried out with the most complete success. There are few plays in existence so original and so telling in construction as this.

The tearful enthusiasm of five generations of playgoers may be said to justify this encomium; but it is evidently

*Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 294.

based upon an ideal of drama which leaves wholly out of account any rational imitation of human actions or of human speech.

Jaffier, a young Venetian, has married the beautiful Belvidera without the consent of her father, the Senator Priuli. In three years he has run through his moderate fortune, and there is, to put it bluntly, an execution in the house. Consequently he listens eagerly to the suggestion of his friend Pierre, a soldier with a grievance, that he should join in a conspiracy for the massacre of the Senate and the subversion of society. At a meeting of the conspirators he is received with a certain amount of not unjustified distrust; whereupon he calls in his wife, and hands her over to the conspirators, saying:

> To you, sirs, and your honours I bequeath her,
> And with her this: (*Gives a dagger.*) when I prove unworthy—
> You know the rest—then strike it to her heart.

At this atrocious proceeding, Belvidera does, indeed, manifest a mild resentment; but she goes off unresisting.

Having secured a hostage, one would think the conspirators would guard her carefully; but reason has no voice in their councils. Her jailor, the aged Renault, first offers her violence, and then allows her to escape and rejoin her husband. She has no difficulty in persuading him that his associates, whom he had regarded as

> Men of souls fit to reform the ills
> Of all mankind

are, in fact, a troop of "cursed fiends who wait to damn him." After a great deal of ranting vacillation, he yields to Belvidera's entreaties, and determines to warn the Senate (including her father) of the fate awaiting them. As he goes off with her, he says:

> Come, lead me forward now, like a tame lamb
> To sacrifice. Thus in his fatal garlands,
> Decked fine and pleased, the wanton skips and plays,
> Trots by the enticing, flattering priestess' side,
> And, much transported with his little pride,

> Forgets his dear companions of the plain;
> Till, by her bound, he's on the altar lain,
> Yet then too hardly bleats, such pleasure's in the pain.

I think it would be hard to find, even in Restoration tragedy, a more undramatic speech, an image more inappropriate to the character and the situation.

Now comes a sequence of events in which Otway betrays an extraordinary lack of constructive common-sense. In the first place, as Jaffier and Belvidera are on their way to the Senate House, they are arrested by an officer's guard, and carried thither as prisoners. This meaningless incident gives an appearance of constraint to an act which is in fact voluntary, and ought to be so beyond all possibility of mistake. But this is a trifle: worse remains behind. The whole tragedy hinges upon Jaffier's betrayal of his friend Pierre and his fellow-conspirators; but (incredible as it may seem) Jaffier does not betray them at all. Before he and Belvidera have reached the Senate House, Priuli has warned his colleagues of the plot, of which he has received intelligence "from unknown hands."* But there is still something left for Jaffier to betray—to wit, the names of the conspirators. He conceives the idea of bargaining for their safety. He demands:

> For myself full pardon,
> Besides the lives of two and twenty friends,
> *Whose names are here enrolled.*

What can be more ridiculous than making him confess that he has the names written down?† He is a prisoner; there has already been talk of putting him to the torture; what can possibly prevent the Senators from wresting the paper from him, instead of "capitulating," as the Duke puts it, for the lives of the gang? And now comes the crowning imbecility. Scarcely has Jaffier handed in the list of his accomplices, when a noise is heard without, and behold! a guard enters with the whole body of the conspirators, who

*There might be some sense in this if it were Belvidera who had anonymously warned her father; but there is no hint of her having done so.

†In the Mermaid Series, an absurd stage-direction says at this point, "Delivers list." It does not appear in other editions. But he might as well deliver the list as confess that it is in his possession.

have been secured at one fell swoop, on we know not what information—so that Jaffier has, after all, betrayed nobody, and the Senate's promise of immunity for the gang becomes null and void! A more lame and impotent conclusion could scarcely be conceived. Yet this is the play of which Mr. Gosse declares the construction to be "original and telling" almost beyond parallel.

I need not carry my analysis further. Pierre is sentenced to be broken on the wheel, but the officer in charge of the execution very carelessly allows him to have a parting colloquy with Jaffier, who first stabs his friend and then himself. Belvidera has meanwhile gone mad; and when the death of Jaffier and Pierre is announced to her by the apparition of their bloody ghosts, she joins them in the grave.

One or two more specimens of the style of this "noble masterpiece," in which there is nothing "in the least stagey." When Jaffier learns that the conspirators are to be executed, he thus relieves his feelings:

> Final destruction seize on all the world!
> Bend down, ye Heavens, and shutting round this earth,
> Crush the vile globe into its first confusion;
> Scorch it with elemental flames to one curst cinder,
> And all us little creepers in 't, called men,
> Burn, burn to nothing! but let Venice burn
> Hotter than all the rest; here kindle hell
> Ne'er to extinguish; and let souls hereafter
> Groan here, in all those pains which mine feels now!

This leads up to a parting scene with Belvidera, after which she takes leave of her wits in the following terms:

> Cursed be my days, and doubly cursed my nights,
> Which I must now mourn out in widowed tears;
> Blasted be every herb, and fruit, and tree;
> Cursed be the rain that falls upon the earth,
> And may the general curse reach man and beast!
> Oh, give me daggers, fire, or water;
> How I could bleed, how burn, how drown, the waves
> Huzzing and booming round my sinking head,
> Till I descended to the peaceful bottom!
> Oh, there's all quiet, here all rage and fury;

> The air's too thin, and pierces my weak brain;
> I long for thick substantial sleep. Hell! hell!
> Burst from the centre, rage and roar aloud,
> If thou art half so hot, so mad as I am!

But, presently calming down a little, she is led off with these lines:

> Say not a word of this to my old father.
> Murmuring streams, soft shades, and springing flowers,
> Lutes, laurels, seas of milk, and ships of amber.

Otway reaches the height of his genius, however, in three lines of the parting scene between Pierre and Jaffier. Pierre says:

> Oh, Jaffier,
> Though thou'st betrayed me, do me some way justice.

Whereupon Jaffier replies:

> No more of that: thy wishes shall be satisfied;
> *I have a wife, and she shall bleed; my child too*
> *Yield up his little throat, and all to appease thee.*

And he is actually going off to kill his wife and child when Pierre detains him. No comment can do justice to the insane brutality of the mind which conceived this passage.

What are we to think of the fact that a critic like Mr. Gosse, to whom we owe so much delicate and just appreciation of the beautiful things of literature, can praise almost without reserve this clumsy, blundering, coarsely bombastic work? Is it not a signal proof of that lack of any sound standard of dramatic values on which I insisted in my opening lecture? If the literary critic can be said to have any standard at all, it is based, not upon a general consideration of what drama should be, and is in its consummate examples, —not upon any study of the technique of construction and dialogue—but on an unquestioning acceptance as virtues of some of the worst vices of the primitive Elizabethan drama:

vices which the Restoration inherited and grotesquely outdid.*

It is clear, at all events, that the plays I have cited depend for their attraction, not upon the orderly and skilful development of an interesting and probable plot, not upon the faithful delineation of character, and revelation of the subtleties of the human heart, but upon a pompously and often violently exaggerated form of utterance—in a word, upon what I have ventured to call Passion in contradistinction to Imitation. Since it is upon record that they interested and moved the audiences of their time, and even of the next century—moved them to sympathetic paroxysms unknown in the theatre of today—we are bound to believe that they must have had, in performance, some element of attraction which is now lost to us. What that element was there can be no question—it was virtuosity in acting, not very different from that of the great singers of today.

Contemporary descriptions of the great actors of the period place this beyond all doubt. Here, for instance, is a well-known passage from Cibber's *Apology* (Chap. IV).

> There cannot be a stronger Proof of the Charms of harmonious Elocution than the many even unnatural Scenes and Flights of the false Sublime it has lifted into Applause. In what Raptures have

*In Otway's first play, *Alcibiades*, a sluggish and very tedious opening leads up to the high-piled melodramatic horror in the fourth and fifth acts. The scene in which the Queen and Tissaphernes murder Agis (partly imitated from *Macbeth*) is not ineffective. For the rest the play is one tissue of strained sentiment, monstrous villainy and rhyming rant. Take as an example the last dying speech of the Queen:

> No, when I'm dead be thus my fame supplied:
> She liv'd a murd'ress, and a murd'ress died. . . .
> I long to be in state; my lords, farewell:
> Now, noble Charon, hoist up sail for hell. (*Dies.*)

Caius Marius, though excessively tedious, is less violently extravagant than most of the tragedies of the period. In its sentimental underplot *Romeo and Juliet* is annexed and horribly mutilated. Otway cannot even steal three successive lines without "improving" them. For instance:

> *Marius Junior.* Look, love, what envious streaks
> Of light embroider all the cloudy east.
> Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
> Upon the mountain tops sits gaily drest,
> While all the birds bring music to his levee.
> I must begone and live, or stay and die—
> *Lavinia.* Oh! Oh! what wretched fortune is my lot!
> Sure, giving thee, Heaven grew too far in debt
> To pay, 'till bankrupt-like it broke; whilst I,
> A poor compounding creditor, am forc'd
> To take a mite for endless sums of joy.

It is cruel to contrast this miserable stuff with the passionate music of Shakespeare; but Otway has himself to blame. Two of his three comedies, *Friendship in Fashion* and *The Soldier's Fortune*, are among the most infamous of the period. The third, *The Atheist*, though preposterous in action and helpless in construction, is not quite so deplorable. It almost suggests a Spanish original.

I seen an Audience at the furious Fustian and turgid Rants in *Nat. Lee's Alexander the Great!* For though I can allow this Play a few great Beauties, yet it is not without its extravagant Blemishes. Every Play of the same Author has more or less of them. Let me give you a Sample from this. *Alexander*, in a full crowd of Courtiers, without being occasionally call'd or provok'd to it, falls into this Rhapsody of Vain-glory.

> *Can none remember? Yes, I know all must!*
> And therefore they shall know it agen.
> *When Glory, like the dazzling Eagle, stood*
> *Perch'd on my Beaver, in the Granic Flood,*
> *When Fortune's Self my Standard trembling bore,*
> *And the pale Fates stood frighted on the Shore,*
> *When the Immortals on the Billows rode,*
> *And I myself appear'd the leading God.*

When these flowing Numbers came from the Mouth of a *Betterton* the Multitude no more desired Sense to them than our musical *Connoisseurs* think it essential in the celebrated Airs of an *Italian* Opera. Does not this prove that there is very near as much Enchantment in the well-governed Voice of an Actor, as in the sweet Pipe of a Eunuch? If I tell you there was no one Tragedy, for many Years, more in favour with the Town than *Alexander*, to what must we impute this its command of publick Admiration? . . . Where must have lain the Charm that once made the Publick so partial to this Tragedy? Why, plainly in the Grace and Harmony of the Actor's Utterance.

Of Mrs. Barry, again, Cibber tells us that "she poured out sentiment with an enchanting harmony"; and "harmonious" was an epithet currently applied to the delivery no less of actors than of actresses.

Imagine a modern actor—imagine even Forbes Robertson, with his beautiful voice—rendering one of the rants of Almanzor, Alexander or Jaffier as it was evidently intended to be rendered! He could not if he would, and would not if he could. You might as well ask him to go to Covent Garden and sing Verdi's Otello or Wagner's Tristan. The style of acting which obtained from the Restoration down to 1850 or thereabouts may be judged from theatrical portraits—both from serious works of art and from the "penny plain, twopence coloured" prints of Skelt and his congeners. They are always represented in violent and

sprawling attitudes which would move a modern audience to shouts of laughter. Gilbert's Pirate King seems to us an almost inconceivable caricature; but he does not exaggerate the poses and gestures which had been accepted as serious art until well on in the nineteenth century.

In the works of Nicholas Rowe, who flourished between 1700 and 1715, we find a return to sanity and, indeed, something more—for Rowe, though weighed down by a ponderous convention, was a born dramatist. He had an eye for character; he could devise a really striking situation; and amid all the verbiage of his style, he knew how to strike a note of real pathos. His first play, *The Ambitious Mother*, contains one very dramatic and one genuinely tragic scene. In the first, the young Artaban rebels against the villainies of his mother, undertaken in his own interests; in the second, Cleone, intent on saving Artaxerxes, but unable to convince him of her good faith, gives the last proof of devotion by committing suicide. In *Tamerlane*, though the interest is absurdly divided between the two heroines, Arpasia* and Selima, and though Tamerlane himself is really outside the story of the play, yet the contrast between him and Bajazet (William III and Louis XIV) is not ineffective, and Bajazet is a powerful portrait of an utterly unbridled megalomaniac, devoured by a ferocious egoism, and incapable of listening to reason—a man who goes through life cutting off his nose to spite his face.

Rowe's most famous play, however, and one of the most popular plays of the century, was *The Fair Penitent*, founded upon Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*. Sir Walter Scott is a critic from whom one does not lightly differ; yet I cannot agree with him in placing the Elizabethan far above the Augustan tragedy. Massinger, for one thing, does not reach the real subject of his play until after two entirely superfluous opening acts. In the second place—and this is surely the crucial point—Calista, in her sullen pride and sensuality, has far more psychological truth than the capriciously vicious Beau-

*See p. 230 for the effect produced by Mrs. Siddons in this character.

melle, who, in sheer levity and bravado, accepts the advances of the ridiculous fop, Novall junior. Compared with that popinjay, "the gallant, gay Lothario" is a capital Don Juan. Has he not been for two centuries the typical libertine of the English-speaking world—contesting that bad eminence with Molière's and Mozart's hero? Finally, the last act of Rowe's play, though a mere piece of funereal pageantry and lachrymose rhetoric, is free from the absurdity of Rochfort's conduct, and the tedious forensic hair-splittings in which Massinger indulges. The chief superiority of the earlier play lies in the relation between Charalois and Romont, as compared with that between Altamont and Horatio. The quarrel between these two personages is a fine example of conventional unreason. Altamont does not dream of demanding, nor Horatio of offering, any proof of the accusation against Calista: they simply spout at each other till they fall to blows.

The merits of *Jane Shore*, which almost rivalled *The Fair Penitent* in popularity, are elegiac rather than dramatic—by far the most dramatic scene is borrowed from Shakespeare. Rowe had an undeniable gift of more or less melodious pathos, which he usually contrived to keep well on the hither side of bombast. It is this gift which alone lends interest to *Lady Jane Grey*. *Ulysses* has one or two good scenes, but is on the whole an ineffectual effort; while in *The Royal Convert* an unusually violent action is set forth in unusually stilted language. Even in an age when the historic sense was undeveloped, people must surely have been a little taken aback to hear a follower of Hengist expressing himself thus:

> Rest on my Diligence and Caution safe.
> Ere twice the Ruler of the Day return
> To gild the chalky Cliffs on *Britain's* Shore,
> Some favorable Moment shall be found
> To move the King, your Royal Brother's Heart.

Rowe may be summed up as a later and lesser Massinger—inferior on the whole, though not, I think, in the particular case of *The Fair Penitent*.

Thomas Southerne, an older man and a slightly older dramatist, was Rowe's great rival as a tear-compeller. More than half of *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) is given up to despicable comic scenes; but in the last two acts the "Enoch Arden theme," now so familiar, is treated with a hysterical power in virtue of which the play outlived the eighteenth century. Still more popular was *Oroonoko* (1696), a piece of unmitigated nonsense, in which a negro prince, freshly kidnapped from Africa, talks fluent and bombastic blank-verse, and is, on the whole, an accomplished type of wishy-washy sentimental heroism. When it is suggested to him that the Governor of the colony, "in a fit of his intemperance," may tear the lovely Imoinda from his arms, he replies:

> Ha! thou hast rouz'd
> The lion in his den; he stalks abroad
> And the wide forest trembles at his roar.

For more than a century and a quarter, every theatre in England trembled at the roar of Oroonoko. It is notable that his marriage to Imoinda (of doubtful nationality, but certainly a European) is regarded as a matter of course, and that the Slaver, the Governor and the Planters are all accepted without demur as double-dyed villains. The comic (or at any rate indecent) underplot, wholly unconnected with the main action, is redolent of its period. Southerne's four or five comedies, it may be added, are almost incredibly devoid of talent. It is impossible to make head or tail of their confused and utterly trivial plots. Here, indeed, he remains a tear-compeller, but the tears are those of boredom.

The fame of their authors secures to this day a certain number of readers for Congreve's *Mourning Bride* and Addison's *Cato*. Dr. Johnson's enthusiasm has even conferred a sort of adventitious immortality on a passage in *The Mourning Bride;* and *Cato,* a masterpiece of dignified common-sense, can actually be read with pleasure. These plays have little enough in common with the ravings of Otway and Lee; but, as we read them, we marvel rather

that they should have lived for a century than that they should at last have died.

The reason why this whole body of art is, and must remain, so completely dead to us is that it represents a mere conventional marking-time—a retrogression rather than an advance. The true line of development lay (I suggest) away from Passion—that is to say Passion for Passion's sake, Passion at all costs—towards ever more delicate and faithful Imitation. In Shakespeare at his best we find a sort of equilibrium of the two elements, which his genius enabled him to maintain. He gave us, in the class of characters whereof Falstaff is the consummate exemplar, pure imitation of the raciest order. Falstaff is as real as Uncle Toby or Sancho Panza. In the general run of his characters, however, Shakespeare clothed imitation in a conventional medium of rhetoric, constantly passing over into pure music; but this could not conceal the truth of their lineaments, the subtlety of their soul-processes. The platform-stage, which largely exempted him from the trammels of space and time, did not make for any great nicety in construction; yet even here Shakespeare in some degree anticipated modern developments. He has given us some examples of technique, in the highest sense of the word. If, then, the writers of the Restoration had been inspired to make Shakespeare their master, and to work ahead from where he left off, they might, however inferior in genius, have produced plays that would live, inasmuch as they represented movement in the right direction. But this inspiration was denied to them. They paid Shakespeare lip-homage, while maltreating his works; and they took as their models his immeasurably lesser contemporaries, whose rhetorical extravagances they judged to be the essence of drama, and set themselves—with triumphant success—to outdo. Thus passion degenerated into sheer bombast and fustian, and was in that guise accepted, for more than a century and a half, as the one thing needful in serious drama. Here is a brief extract from a play, not, like *The Conquest of Granada,* of 1670, but of 1820—just a hundred and fifty

years later. One character remarks that Justice will be defeated, and another replies:

> Who says that?
> He lies in the face of the gods! She is immutable,
> Immaculate and immortal!—and though all
> The guilty globe should blaze, she will spring up
> Through the fire, and soar above the crackling pile,
> With not a downy feather ruffled by
> Its fierceness.

This rant would not be at all out of place in the mouth of Lee's Alexander or Otway's Jaffier. I quote it from Sheridan Knowles' *Virginius*, a play in which Macready, who seems almost an actor of yesterday, created the title-part, and which was hailed as a work of genius by no less a man than Charles Lamb. We could scarcely ask for a better proof of the dominance, down to the threshold of our own time, of the devastating belief that, not nature, but robustious un-nature, was the first word and the last of serious drama.

VII

In dealing with the Comedy of the Restoration, it is necessary, but extremely difficult, to avoid mixing up two lines of enquiry which ought to be kept distinct. We have to ask ourselves two questions: First, is this body of literature defensible from the moral point of view? Second, is it admirable from the technical or purely artistic point of view? Let me at once confess that my answer to the first question is so emphatically in the negative that I cannot quite trust myself to form an unbiassed judgment on the second question. But I will try to give reasons for whatever criticisms I may advance.

It is the fashion of the day to deny that we have any right to regard the dramatists of the Restoration as moral agents, as responsible human beings, at all. "Others abide our question, they are free." Charles Lamb's delightful paradox on *The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century* is taken seriously as the corner-stone of a whole critical system. Lamb, as we all know, would have had us see in these comedies "a world in themselves almost as much as fairyland," or (in a juster image) an Alsatia where the writs of decency do not run. Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt took up the tale; Macaulay broke the butterfly of paradox on the wheel of his logic; and now that Macaulay's common-sense has become the derision and the scoff of even "Macaulay's schoolboy," we are confronted by a clique of enthusiasts who so love the atmosphere of this fetid fairyland, this insanitary Alsatia, that they (in my judgment) ridiculously over-estimate the intellectual and technical merits of the literature in which its fragrance is preserved. In the fulness of time comes Mr. John Palmer with an ingenious and brilliantly written book, *The Comedy of Manners,* in which he shifts the ground of the defence, and adopts what he calls the "historical" standpoint. The "historical" argument is that because Etherege and Wycherley would not

have understood our objections to their outlook upon life, therefore these objections are irrelevant and futile. The plain answer is, I think, that historical understanding is one thing, æsthetic appreciation another, and that we are not bound to consider a thing delightful and desirable merely because we can (more or less) picture to ourselves the mental attitude of men who were so unfortunate as to take a pleasure in it. To understand an attitude is one thing, to imitate it is another; and attitudinizing æsthetics are the negation and the bane of sound criticism.

Another of Mr. Palmer's arguments (he will scarcely call it "historical") is this:* "It is perfectly true that rape and adultery are part of the action of the majority of the plays of our comic dramatists. But the treatment being purely comic, these actions cease to be morally significant." "Thus men may grow wiser every day!" says Touchstone. "It is the first time that ever I heard breaking of ribs was sport for ladies." So to Mr. Palmer I reply, "It is the first time that ever I heard that rape* was legitimate matter for 'comic treatment.' " We shall hear next of comic cannibalism.

All this special pleading must, I think, be brushed aside. Let us get rid, if you like, of the terms "moral" and "immoral," and put the matter thus: *The very essence of social comedy is to present a certain criticism of life. Restoration comedy acutely realises this: it is full to overflowing of sententious generalisations, of a sort of perverted, would-be morality. And its criticism of life, whether explicit or implied in action, is stupid, nauseous and abominable beyond anything else that can be found in the world's dramatic literature.* If this be thought too sweeping, let me say: *beyond anything of which the rumour has reached me.*

I do not think it has ever been noticed how unique is this phenomenon. For better or worse, Restoration Comedy certainly stands alone. Its brutality, its bestiality, are un-

The Comedy of Manners, p. 139.

*Mr. Palmer goes somewhat beyond his brief. Actual rape is not so common as all that, even in Restoration Comedy. The significant thing is that, if it were, Mr. Palmer would defend it.

rivalled. The coarseness of Aristophanes is of a wholly different quality, and immeasurably less offensive. Plautus and Terence are refinment itself in comparison with Wycherley and Dryden, Otway, Southerne and Aphra Behn. In the classic drama of France and Spain there is, to my knowledge, nothing at all comparable to the works of these writers and their contemporaries. It may be possible, here or there, to discover some obscure play that may be likened to *Love in a Tub,* or *The Country Wife,* or *The Soldier's Fortune;* but it is quite certain that there is no body of dramatic literature which calls for such defences as those at which we have just been glancing, and which can be acquitted only on the plea that comedy has no concern with decency or good manners. If we are to find any parallel to this literature, it must be, I think, in a certain type of modern French farce, and in its British adaptations. But though the tone of these pieces is often sickening, their cynicism is not so aggressive and self-complacent as that of the Restoration. No—there is no denying that England holds what is now called a record in the matter of boastful, brazen, foul-mouthed lewdness; and it is surely a very perverted form of literary patriotism that undertakes to glory in her shame.

Putting all considerations of morality aside, who can possibly deny that the writers of this period have a morbid passion for all that is malodorous and unsavoury? Where else shall we find a body of literature in which sexual disease is a constant and succulent subject of jest?* Foul linen, foul breath, physical misfortunes and deformities of all sorts are the most favourite of topics. We hold our noses as we read. It is all very interesting from a "historical" point of view, as illustrating the coarse insensitiveness of our ancestors' nerves. But, æsthetically, a stench is a stench, even if it is wafted to us from the seventeenth century.

*Mr. Palmer's attempt to tar Shakespeare with the same brush (p. 69) is palpably absurd. Shakespeare's allusions to this subject are singularly few; for the mere use of the current imprecation, "a pox on" such and such a thing cannot reasonably count as an allusion. Even in this form, the word occurs less than a score of times in his thirty-odd plays.

Drunkenness is an accomplishment in which the fine gentlemen of this literature glory scarcely less than in unbridled licentiousness. The very least of their foibles is a raffish rowdyism which delights in nocturnal "rambling," as they call it, and window-smashing. In the very first scene of the very first play in which the true Restoration spirit is shown, Etherege's *Love in a Tub*, we find that the hero, Sir Frederick Frollick, has been drunk overnight, and being denied admission to a disreputable house, has raised a riot which has alarmed the whole neighbourhood. We are told that he

> marched bravely at the rear of an army of linkboys; upon the sudden gave defiance, and then waged a bloody war with the constable; and having vanquished that dreadful enemy, committed a general massacre on the glass-windows.

To talk of a fantastic fairyland in such a connection is manifestly absurd. This is a passage of sheer realism, only too justly representing the manners of the author and his crew. "Well, then," say the enthusiasts, shifting their ground from fairyland to Alsatia, "is it not the business of comedy to mirror life?" Yes, but not to demand admiration for drunken blackguardism. The whole case for Restoration comedy as a purely non-moral product breaks down the moment we look into it. It is insistent in its criticism of life; it is constantly calling upon us for admiration of one line of conduct and condemnation, or at all events ridicule, of another. And the line of conduct it despises is relatively good, while that which it admires is consistently infamous.

Even if all these charges were baseless—even if Restoration comedy were sanitary and civilised—we should still have to set it down as one of the narrowest and pettiest of literary phenomena. It is concerned with one topic alone —what we may mildly term gallantry. Everything else—foppery, affectation, rusticity, jealousy, miserliness, superstition, rascality—it makes subsidiary to that one great theme. It is an encyclopedia of loose living. Marriage is mentioned only to be jeered at. Old age is never treated otherwise than as an occasion for some gloating study of

senile lust. It is a positive relief when, in some of the minor playwrights, such as Crowne and Shadwell, we find an undercurrent of political allusion—as, for instance, in the satire upon Titus Oates and the Popish Plot in Crowne's *City Politicks*.* Such plays remind us that there was actually a real world around this mimic Alsatia—a world which did not give its undivided attention to debauchery. Had the theatre fairly represented its age, the British nation could never have emerged from such a morass of levity, cynicism, corruption and disease. It would have gone down in the quicksand, like the last laird of Ravenswood; and on the surface would have floated only the feather from Sir Fopling Flutter's hat. But the theatre did not fairly represent the age: it grossly and abominably libelled it. Was it not the age of Locke and Newton, of Tillotson and Barrow, of Baxter and Bunyan, of Penn and Petty, of Marvell and Walton, of Sir William Temple and Dorothy Osborne, of Evelyn and Pepys? I do not hesitate to add Pepys to this list; for, though he was no Puritan, he showed that a man of that age could have his weaknesses and yet be a useful and reputable member of society; and his diary paints a very different picture, even of the Court end of the town, from that which we gather from the dramatists. Mr. Palmer makes a great deal of the fact that neither Pepys nor Evelyn utters any emphatic protest against the villainies of the stage. This is scarcely true of Evelyn. On February 9, 1665, before the scandal was at its height, he wrote to Viscount Cornbury: "Plays are now with us become a licentious excess and a vice." But it may be admitted that it is remarkable how slow the decent men of the period were in raising any public protest. No doubt they shared that in-

*There is in the second act of this play one of those passages of real humour, as distinct from artificial wit, which are so rare in Restoration comedy. The Bricklayer is remonstrating with the Podesta, who has left him in the lurch when he fell into the hands of the enemy:

Bricklayer. Your servant, sir! I am much beholding to you, and the rest of my brethren of the city, for the kindness you showed me today in refusing to be bound for me.

Podesta. I'll answer you, sir: we resolv'd to go prudently to work; we did not know but they might have laid treason to your charge, so we resolv'd to see whether they durst have tried you, and if they had tried you, whether they durst have brought you in guilty, and if they had brought you in guilty, whether they durst have hang'd you, and if they had hang'd you—then, let 'em look to themselves!

sensitiveness to foul odours which was a characteristic of their time, and which we can recapture only by a foolish effort of "historical" affectation. But the main explanation, I suggest, is that they stood too near the phenomenon to see it in its true perspective. Only to very exceptional men does evil become more intolerable through familiarity. Most of us, when it is thrust every day upon our observation, accept it with a sort of fatalism, as a thing inevitable and beyond our power to change.*

Mr. Palmer, however, is incautious when he says, "All the evidence agrees as to the blindness of the period to the enormous sinfulness of the theatre." In occasional speeches in the plays themselves, and in many lines of prologues and epilogues, we find frank confession of the corrupt state of affairs. Several dramatists seem to have been quite alive to the mote in their neighbour's eye.† But the notablest—one may almost say the noblest—confession comes from the greatest man, and is to be found in a poem published in 1686, twelve years before Jeremy Collier "trumpeted a revolution," and heralded a slow re-awakening of conscience and common-sense. The writer is John Dryden, in his ode *To the Pious Memory of Mrs. Anne Killigrew;* and this is what he says:

> O gracious God! how far have we
> Prophaned Thy heavenly gift of poesy!
> Made prostitute and profligate the muse,
> Debased to each obscene and impious use. . . .
> O wretched we! why were we hurried down
> This lubrique and adulterate age
> (Nay, added fat pollutions of our own)
> T' increase the steaming ordures of the stage?
> What can we say t' excuse our second fall?

Mr. Palmer does not quote these lines: they do not figure in the manifestoes of the Phœnix Society. Nor were they

*This explanation refers especially to Evelyn's silence. The "roguishness" of Pepys no doubt inclined him to tolerance.

†Take, for instance, these pointed remarks by Otway's Lady Squeamish in *Friendship in Fashion:* "Their comedies nowadays are the filthiest things, full of nauseous doings, which they mistake for raillery and intrigue. . . . All their gentlemen and men of wit, as they style 'em, are either silly, conceited, impudent coxcombs, or else rude, unmannerly, drunken fellows, faugh!" See also a passage in the preface to Shadwell's *Sullen Lovers,* ending thus: "Methinks, if there were nothing but the ill manners of it, it should make poets avoid that indecent way of writing."

only the ejaculation of a lucid interval. Even under the sting of Collier's attack, the poet, then nearing his end, had the manliness and good sense to admit that, though "perhaps the parson stretched a point too far," his strictures were substantially just. I am content to take my stand with Dryden, even as against Mr. Palmer and the learned editor of the works of Mrs. Aphra Behn.

Mr. Palmer, in a notable passage,* admits that the sheer ugliness of much of the language of these plays mars the æsthetic enjoyment of the modern reader. He says:

> The just critic has simply to overlook the offensiveness of words which today are æsthetically—we are not now upon a question of morals—offensive. Words which jar upon the ear of a modern reader, and spoil his pleasure, passed unnoticed in the Theatres of Fletcher and Congreve. The just critic must simply ignore them. *Indeed, to recover the true flavour of passages where they occur, they must be omitted.*

We have here a direct condemnation of the painful pedantry of the latter-day Societies which insist on thrusting seventeenth century plays, entirely unexpurgated, upon mixed audiences of modern men and women. Mr. Palmer hits the nail accurately on the head—the policy is finally condemned by the plain fact that this language does not and cannot produce upon modern hearers the effect that the author intended. But Mr. Palmer does not tell us how "the just critic," even in reading, is to ignore what offends his senses. As well exhort him to "ignore" the dissonances of an untuned piano. And, finally, if we are permitted to find ugly words æsthetically offensive, it is hard to see why we should be forbidden, in the name of "history," to express the same judgment of still uglier thoughts and actions. Mr. Palmer's whole argument suffers from an inextricable confusion between historic interest and æsthetic pleasure. He is for ever, and quite unconsciously, shifting from the one standpoint to the other.

Let us now try, so far as possible, to put aside all ethical considerations, and regard this literature from the purely

*Comedy of Manners, p. 68.

æsthetic and technical point of view. Here we are at once confronted with the little word—I had almost said the baneful little word—"wit," and the questions to which it gives rise.

The English word "wit" is roughly equivalent to the French *esprit,* the German *Geist;* but it will scarcely be denied, I think, that English "wit" is more closely associated with all sorts of verbal facetiousness, from the epigram down to the pun, than is the corresponding word in either of those languages. Now from the Restoration down to our own day, from Etherege to H. J. Byron, it has been assumed as a matter of course that verbal wit is the first concern of comedy; and that assumption has, I believe, more than anything else, artificialized and sterilised the English drama. Whence did it arise? A full answer to that question would demand a lecture to itself. There can be no doubt, however, that the Restoration took it over from the Elizabethans. About the time of Shakespeare's birth, men began to notice and reflect upon the language they spoke and wrote; and they took a childish delight in the discovery of verbal coincidences, double meanings and the like. We know how Shakespeare himself was attacked by these linguistic measles; how such a play as *Love's Labour's Lost* shows the fever at its height; and how he did not, even to the end, quite shake off its effects. Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson, the idols of the Restoration, were specially valued for their "wit," and this was the quality which their disciples of the new generation specially set themselves to imitate. Doubtless, however, the conversational habits of the age did, in some measure, excuse this pre-occupation. The self-conscious straining after verbal wit which, in Elizabeth's day, had been confined to comparatively narrow circles of courtiers and men-about-town, had now extended, one may say, to the whole of that society to which the playhouses looked for their support. Dryden, in one of his prologues, says that, in his own polished age, one heard as much wit in ordinary conversation as was to be found in the best pages of the pre-war dramatists; and we may be sure that

he meant what he said. Taking Mr. Palmer's "historic" point of view, then, we must admit that the "wit" of the Restoration comedy was probably, in a measure, realistic—it was but a legitimate exaggeration of a straining after verbal smartness which did in fact characterise the conversation of the people whose manners it set forth to portray.

None the less must we regard this constant strain, this incorrigible artificiality, as a disease which fastened upon English comedy in the seventeenth century, and endured, as a pure convention, for something like a hundred and fifty years after it had ceased to have any excuse in the prevailing fashion of society. That the dialogue of comedy should be aërated by humour no one would deny. Even epigram and repartee are welcome in due time and place. But in the great masters of comedy—in Molière and Holberg—we find none of that constant chasing after verbal wit* which, to English comedy-writers, seems the first essential of their craft. In some hands it degenerated into sheer inanity, in others into the boorish rudeness which earned for a certain class of plays the designation of "the comedy of no-manners."

Now as to the quality of this wit to which, in the Restoration Comedy, nature, verisimilitude and decency are so constantly sacrificed. It has, I think, been too much taken for granted. True wit, it seems to me, may be defined as humour with a barb to it; and a barbed saying ought surely to stick in the memory. But I find, after assiduous reading of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh, that my memory retains scarcely any of their boasted similes and epigrams. The reason is, perhaps, not that they lack barb but that they

*I have made a little statistical study, which does not prove much, indeed, yet is not uninstructive. The words "wit" and "witty" occur three hundred and forty-seven times in the accepted canon of Shakespeare; but most often "wit" appears in the plural (e.g. "out of his wits") or is plainly to be accepted in the sense of intelligence or judgment. The distinction is not always quite clear, but, to the best of my reckoning, "wit" occurs in the Restoration sense of "smartness" one hundred and sixteen times—twenty-nine times in *Love's Labour's Lost*, nineteen times in *Much Ado*, twelve times in *As You Like It*, eight times in *Twelfth Night*. I suggest that the merit of these comedies is pretty exactly in the inverse ratio of the frequency with which "wit" is talked of. In the whole of the remaining thirty-three plays the word occurs only forty-eight times. Now in Congreve's four comedies (prologues and epilogues included) "wit" is spoken of ninety-one times—only twenty-five times less than in all Shakespeare. The distribution is as follows: *Old Bachelor*, eight times; *Double-Dealer*, thirty times; *Love for Love*, thirty times; *Way of the World*, twenty-three times. In *Le Misanthrope* the word "esprit" occurs thirteen times in all, but only six times (so far as I can judge) in the sense in which "wit" was constantly used by Molière's English contemporaries.

lack substance. There is no permanent significance, no weight of thought, behind them. Here are two barbed sayings from Oscar Wilde's comedies which have stuck in my memory since the moment I first heard them: "Vulgarity is the behaviour of other people" and "There are only two tragedies in life: not getting what you want—and getting it." I try in vain to remember anything in Restoration Comedy in the least comparable to these two sayings—the one incisively satirical, the other pregnant and profound. Yet Macaulay, who was certainly not prejudiced in favour of this literature, could write of "the gorgeous blaze [of wit] which dazzles us almost to blindness in *Love for Love* and *The Way of the World*."

Etherege, to be sure, is not Congreve, but is held to have been Congreve's great precursor and tutor in the art of sparkling dialogue. Let us, then, take Etherege at his best and see what we can make of him; and to be sure of getting him at his best I turn to one of the passages selected for special praise by Mr. Edmund Gosse,* who may almost be called his real discoverer.

"The great merit of *The Man of Mode* [says Mr. Gosse] rests in the brilliance of the writing and the force of the characterisation"; and the characterisation culminated in "Sir Fopling Flutter," the monarch of all beaux and dandies, the froth of Parisian affectation—a delightful personage, almost as alive to us today as to the enchanted audience of 1676. During two acts, the great creature was spoken of, but never seen. . . . At last, in the third act, when curiosity has been raised to a fever, the fop appears. He is introduced to a group of ladies and gentlemen of quality, and when the first civilities are over he begins at once to criticise their dress:

Lady Townley. Wit, I perceive, has more power over you than beauty, Sir Fopling, else you would not have let this lady stand so neglected.

Sir Fopling. (*To Emilia.*) A thousand pardons, madam! Some civilities due of course upon the meeting a long-absent friend. The *éclat* of so much beauty, I confess, ought to have charmed me sooner.

Seventeenth-Century Studies, ed. 1913, p. 279.

Emilia. The *brilliant* of so much good language, sir, has much more power than the little beauty I can boast.

Sir Fopling. I never saw anything prettier than this high work on your *point d'Espagne.*

Emilia. 'Tis not so rich as *point de Venise.*

Sir Fopling. Not altogether, but looks cooler, and is more proper for the season. Dorimant, is not that Medley?

Dorimant. The same, sir.

Sir Fopling. Forgive me, sir, in this *embarras* of civilities, I could not come to have you in my arms sooner. You understand an equipage the best of any man in town, I hear!

Medley. By my own you would not guess it.

Sir Fopling. There are critics who do not write, sir. Have you taken notice of the calèche I brought over?

Medley. Oh yes! it has quite another air than the English make.

Sir Fopling. 'Tis as easily known from an English tumbril as an inns-of-court man is from one of us.

Medley. Truly there is a *bel-air* in calèches as well as men.

Medley. But there are few so delicate as to observe it.

Sir Fopling. The world is generally very *grossier* here indeed.

Lady Townley. (*Looking at Sir Fopling.*) He's very fine.

Emilia. Extremely proper.

Sir Fopling. Oh, a slight suit I had made to appear in at my first arrival—not worthy your admiration, ladies.

Dorimant. The pantaloon is very well mounted.

Sir Fopling. The tassels are new and pretty.

Medley. I never saw a coat better cut.

Sir Fopling. It makes me look long-waisted and, I think, slender.

Lady Townley. His gloves are well-fingered, large and graceful.

Sir Fopling. I was always eminent for being *bien ganté.*

Emilia. He must wear nothing but what are originals of the most famous hands in Paris!

Sir Fopling. You are in the right, madam.

Lady Townley. The suit?

Sir Fopling. Barroy.

Emilia. The garniture?

Sir Fopling. Le Gras.

Medley. The shoes?
Sir Fopling. Piccat.
Dorimant. The periwig?
Sir Fopling. Chedreux.
Lady Townley and Emilia. (*Together.*) The gloves?
Sir Fopling. Orangerie. (*Holding up his hands to them.*) You know the smell, ladies?

Mr. Gosse's comment on this passage is: "The hand that throws in these light touches, in a key of rose-colour on pale grey, no longer reminds us of Molière, but exceedingly of Congreve"; and he goes on: "The brightest scenes in *The Man of Mode* show the original direction taken by Etherege in that line which was more specially to mark the triumph of English Comedy."

Now one can perfectly understand that the scene quoted by Mr. Gosse may have been very effective on the stage. The farcical self-anatomy of a fop, beau, exquisite, dandy, swell—whatever you choose to call him—has from time immemorial been an unfailing stimulus to laughter in the theatre. But where, one cannot but ask, is the wit in this passage? Is there a single word in it that is beyond the compass of the most ordinary intelligence? We may, indeed, find a certain modish grace in the phrasing, which is perhaps not entirely due to the beautifying touch of time; but elegance of style is a quite different thing from wit. Considering the assiduity with which Etherege's fine gentlemen aimed at wit, it seems to me remarkable that they so seldom attained it; and this, I think, may be said, not of Etherege's characters alone. Viewing this body of literature as a whole, we cannot but feel that, in the matter of wit, criticism has, in the most good-natured way, taken the will for the deed. Is there any dramatist of today, who, in reading his predecessors of the Restoration—the best pages of Congreve apart—has not said to himself, "Heavens! how cheaply the men of that age acquired the reputation of wits!"

Wycherley's wit is confessed on all hands to be inferior to Congreve's, to be, indeed, somewhat lacking in grace; but it is supposed to possess a compensating vigour and pun-

gency. His admirers take their stand upon Dryden's Alexandrine: "The satire, wit and strength of manly Wycherley." It would, no doubt, be rash to maintain that there is nothing in this judgment. Indeed, one sees readily enough, in contrasting him with Etherege on the one hand and Congreve on the other, how robustness came to be reckoned his leading characteristic. His cynicism lays about it with a weapon comparable to the cutlass of Manly in *The Plain Dealer*, that "ferocious sensualist" (as Leigh Hunt puts it) into whom he has transmogrified the exquisite Alceste of Molière. But what his contemporaries called strength very often seems to us moderns little better than laborious verbosity. Extracts are apt to do him a certain injustice, for if ever he wrote with ease and gusto it was in passages so gross as utterly to defy quotation. Furthermore, it is only fair to remember that his professional wits, such as Dapperwit, Sparkish and Novel, are satirically presented—they are fools, and sometimes gulls. But a fool may be lightly or may be heavily handled; and Wycherley's touch is of the heaviest. Here is a short passage from *Love in a Wood* (Act II, Sc. 1), where Lydia meets Dapperwit during a moonlight "ramble" in St. James's Park:

Lydia. (*Aside.*) Now do I guess I know my coxcomb. (*To Dapperwit.*) Sir, I am extremely glad I am fallen into the hands of a gentleman that can speak soft things; and this is so fine a night to hear soft things in—morning I should have said.

Dapperwit. It will not be morning, dear madam, till you pull off your mask. (*Aside.*) That, I think, was brisk.

Lydia. Indeed, dear sir, my face would frighten back the sun.

Dapperwit. With glories more radiant than his own. (*Aside.*) I keep up with her I think.

Lydia. But why would you put me to the trouble of lighting the world, when I thought to have gone to sleep?

Dapperwit. You only can do it, dear madam, let me perish!

Lydia. But why would you (of all men) practice treason against your friend Phœbus, and depose him for a mere stranger?

Dapperwit. (*Aside.*) I think she knows me.
Lydia. But he does not do you justice, I believe; and you are so positively cock-sure of your wit, you would refer to a mere stranger your plea to the bay-tree.
Dapperwit. (*Aside.*) She jeers me, let me perish!

One is inclined to say with the hero of a Victorian farce, "What badinage! What persiflage!" Is this, under any convention, to be called good writing?

But *Love in a Wood*, it may be said, was Wycherley's 'prentice piece, and (if he told the truth) was written when he was only nineteen. A more favorable specimen of his wit may be found in his latest, and some say greatest, work, *The Plain Dealer*—in the scene of detraction in Act II, Sc. 1, from which Sheridan no doubt took the idea of his Scandalous College. It is too long for quotation, and is easily accessible. You will recognise in it the touch of the true dramatist, but very little that can rightly be called wit. There is humour rather than wit in the character of Novel, and in the way in which Olivia prevents him from getting a word in edgewise. Such a phrase as "most splendidly, gallantly ugly" is, at a pinch, worth remembering. So is a line of Lord Plausible's, a little further on:

Olivia. Can anyone be called beautiful that squints?
Lord Plausible. Her eyes languish a little, I own.

But, after making the best case we can for it, must we not allow that, in the corresponding passages in *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan immeasurably improves upon his model? There is in his wit an invention, a fantasy, a poise and a polish which Wycherley never approaches.

With regard to Congreve, I have already quoted Macaulay's famous hyperbole. Are we to set it down simply as a peculiarly flagrant example of his vice of over-statement? Or is there indeed something that "dazzles us almost to blindness" in the writing of this periwig'd Olympian? If Macaulay had not bracketed *Love for Love* with *The Way of the World*, one might almost have subscribed to his raptures; for there is, in fact, something dazzling in the char-

acter of Millamant. She is the one great creation of this whole literature: a creature as living as Rosalind or Imogen, as Emma Woodhouse or Beatrix Esmond. She is the Lady in this rout of Comus, not unbesmirched by her environment, but imparting a sort of wayward beauty even to her blemishes. How splendid is her entrance, as Mirabell pictures it.

> Here she comes, i' faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders.

How all the real ghosts, so to speak, of St. James's Park are eclipsed by this ghost of a woman who never existed! She has first a little skirmish with Witwoud, and then the scene goes on:

Mrs. Fainall. But, dear Millamant, why were you so long? . . . You were dressed before I came abroad.

Millamant. Aye, that's true.—Oh, but then I had—Mincing, what had I? Why was I so long?

Mincing. O mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.

Millamant. Oh, aye, letters—I had letters—I am persecuted with letters—I hate letters.—Nobody knows how to write letters, and yet one has 'em, and one does not know why. They serve to pin up one's hair.

Witwoud. Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all your letters? I find I must keep copies.

Millamant. Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud; I never pin up my hair with prose.—I think I tried once, Mincing?

Mincing. O mem, I shall never forget it.

Millamant. Aye, poor Mincing tift and tift all the morning.

Mincing. Till I had the cramp in my fingers, I'll vow, mem; and all to no purpose. But when your la'ship pins it up with poetry, it sets so pleasant the next day as anything, and is so pure and so crisp. . . .

Millamant. Mirabell, did you take exceptions last night? Oh aye, and went away.—Now I think on 't I'm angry—no, now I think on 't I'm pleased—for I believe I gave you some pain.

Mirabell. Does that please you?

Millamant. Infinitely; I love to give pain.

Mirabell. You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature; your true vanity is in the power of pleasing.

Millamant. Oh, I ask your pardon for that—one's cruelty is one's power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.

Mirabell. Aye, aye, suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to destroy your lover—and then how vain, how lost a thing you'll be! Nay, 'tis true: you are no longer handsome when you've lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant; for beauty is the lover's gift. . . .

Millamant. Oh, the vanity of these men!—Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know they could not commend one, if one were not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift!—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases; and they die as soon as one pleases; and then, if one pleases, one makes more.

This is something better than wit: this is fantasy expressing itself in exquisite style. When we come to the famous scene of the covenant between Mirabell and Millamant (Act IV, Sc. 1) we are in presence of one of the summits of English prose. It is a gem of many shining facets: a thing as perfect in its way as Hamlet's "What a piece of work is man."

But Millamant is unique in Congreve's theatre—nay in the world's theatre—and, as I have said, something much greater than wit went to her creation. For the rest, Congreve's wit, though incontestable, is not at all miraculous. It is a heresy to say it, but it seems to me a plain fact that he is not as witty as Sheridan. Here is a characteristic little passage from the first act of *Love for Love*. Valentine's servant, Jeremy, has been warning him against the hopeless scheme of making his living as a poet, when the professed wit, Scandal, enters:

Scandal. What, Jeremy holding forth?

Valentine. The rogue has (with all the wit he could muster up) been declaiming against wit.

Scandal. Aye? Why then, I'm afraid Jeremy has wit; for wherever it is, it's always contriving its own ruin.

Jeremy. Why, so I have been telling my master, sir; Mr. Scandal, for Heaven's sake, sir, try if you can dissuade him from turning poet.

Scandal. Poet! he shall turn soldier first, and rather depend upon the outside of his head than the lining. Why, what the devil, has not your poverty made you enemies enough? Must you needs show your wit to get more?

Jeremy. Aye, more indeed; for who cares for anybody that has more wit than himself?

Scandal. Jeremy speaks like an oracle. Don't you see how worthless great men, and dull rich rogues, avoid a witty man of small fortune? Why, he looks like a writ of inquiry into their titles and estates; and seems commissioned by Heaven to seize the better half.

How flat, how laboured this is! How hard it is to force a smile at it! Read the whole scene, from the rise of the curtain to Jeremy's exit, and you will feel as though the two wits and the valet had laid their heads together to compose a social essay, and had not, after all, produced a very sprightly one.

Let us turn, now, to the question of what may be called structural technique, and see how the comic poets of the Restoration, developed their subjects, or, in plainer terms, told their stories. We may note at the outset that the modern conception of a play as the working-out of a given theme, or the presentation of a single adventure, was foreign to the ideas of the time. In those days the dramatist's problem was, not to give his action organic unity, but to fill a predetermined mould, so large that one action seldom or never sufficed for it. Therefore the underplot, now almost banished from the stage, was an established institution; and a play would often consist of two or three almost unconnected actions, so nearly equal in extent and importance that it was hard to say which was the main plot and which

the underplots.* I do not, however claim for the modern formula any inherent superiority. It might even be argued that a play with two or three deftly interwoven actions might give a broader and essentially truer picture of life than one in which a single theme is, so to speak, lifted out of its context and subjected to intensive study. Unfortunately, the deft interweaving seldom or never occurred.

In the very first of Restoration comedies, Etherege's *Love in a Tub*, we have three distinct actions: (a) the sentimental romance (written in "heroic" couplets) of the rivalry of Bruce and Beaufort for the love of Graciana; (b) the "coney-catching" intrigue of Wheedle, Palmer and Sir Nicholas Cully, a piece of sheer Elizabethanism; (c) the amours of Sir Frederick Frollick and the Widow Rich. These three actions touch at several points, but can never be said to intermingle. The author seems, indeed, to have felt that some sort of unity was desirable, and to have tried to secure it by making Frollick the cousin of Beaufort and the Widow Rich the aunt of Graciana. But these relationships lead to nothing of the slightest moment; all mention of them might be suppressed without in the least affecting the movement of the play. In the three actions taken severally there is no inventive or manipulative skill. The sentimental plot is pure rodomontade; the comic plots consist of sheer buffoonery, helped out by disguises, drunkenness and all the stock expedients of farce. The comedy takes its name from a piece of outrageous horseplay of which Sir Frederick Frollick's French valet is the victim. This might almost be called a fourth plot, but, more accurately, it is an interpolated incident, unattached to any of the three actions. There is, in short, no trace of anything that can be called artistry either in the invention or in the ordering of the incidents. The conception and organisation of the play demanded no talent whatsoever. What talent it possesses lies in the spirited portrayal of dissolute and knavish character.

The plot of Etherege's second comedy, *She Wou'd if She*

*Cibber tells us (*Apology*, Chap. X) that for several years together a play held the stage which was composed of the comic scenes of two of Dryden's plays—*Marriage à la Mode* and *The Maiden Queen*—arbitrarily put together.

Cou'd (1668), shows a certain advance on that of *Love in a Tub*. The situation in the third act, where Sir Oliver Cockwood and his martinet of a spouse, each out on a clandestine frolic, are brought face to face with each other at the Bear Tavern, has been repeated scores of times in modern French farces; it is not here elaborated with any ingenuity. Sir Joslin Jolly in this play fixes the type of the Silenus-like, libidinous old man (repeated and outdone by Otway in his Sir Jolly Jumble), who became a stock figure in the comedy of the period, and sometimes reappears to this day, expurgated but unchastened, in the baser sort of musical farces.

The intrigue of *The Man of Mode* (1676), from which I have already quoted a scene, is heavy, flat and devoid of ingenuity. The piece is, however, less brutal than its predecessors. The worst passage in it is the opening scene, where Dorimant (supposed to represent Lord Rochester) addresses the orange-woman with gratuitous and foul-mouthed ruffianism. There is a clever scene of comedy in the third act, where Young Bellair and Harriet go through the motions of love-making, in order to deceive Old Bellair and Lady Woodvil, who are watching them:

Harriet. Peace! Here they come. I will lean against this wall, and look bashfully down upon my fan, while you, like an amorous spark, modishly entertain me. . . .

Y. Bellair. Now for a look and gestures that may persuade 'em I am saying all the passionate things imaginable.

Harriet. Your head a little more on one side, ease yourself on your left leg, and play with your right hand. . . .

Y. Bellair. A little exercising will make me perfect.

Harriet. Smile, and turn to me again, very sparkish.

Y. Bellair. Will you take your turn and be instructed?

Harriet. With all my heart.

Y. Bellair. At one motion play your fan, roll your eyes, and then settle a kind look upon me.

So the scene goes on. There is more of the true dramatist in it, I venture to think, than in all the babble of Sir Fopling Flutter. If it is really original—if it is not borrowed from some French comedy—it is the best thing Etherege ever did.

We now come to Wycherley, whose career interlocks with that of Etherege, his first play having been produced some four years before Etherege's last. Though in technique he is in no way in advance of his contemporaries, we sometimes feel in his work, as I have said, the touch of a real dramatist —of a man who might have done excellent work had he not been so entirely content with the facile expedients of his age.

In his first play, *Love in a Wood,* there are three plots, not interwoven, but simply running parallel with one another.

The characters of the first intrigue are Sir Simon Addleplot, Dapperwit and Mrs. Martha. It is without interest or ingenuity, and Sir Simon's disguise is merely preposterous.

The second intrigue is that of Gripe and Lucy, with those exemplary matrons, Mrs. Joyner and Mrs. Crossbite pulling the strings. This plot is practically worked out in the one very vigorous, though disgusting scene, of the entrapping and blackmailing of Gripe. (Act III, Sc. 3.)

In the third intrigue, that of Ranger and Lydia, Valentine and Christina, there is a certain ingenuity; but it turns (a) on improbable mistakes of persons in the dark; (b) on the improbable circumstance that Ranger plans to meet the pseudo-Christina at Vincent's lodging instead of his own; (c) on the coincidence which brings the real Christina there at the same moment.

Lady Flippant, the widow who is constantly denouncing marriage while hunting for a husband or a lover, wanders through all three intrigues without belonging to any of them.

The Gentleman Dancing Master is by far the least offensive, and certainly not the least able of Wycherley's plays. There is something really rather charming in the character of Hippolita; Gerrard is quite decent for a Wycherley hero; the contrast between the Francophil and the Hispanophil monomaniacs must have been really comic; and the idea of helping out the audacious attempt to pass Gerrard off as a dancing-master by making Formal resent his sister's pretension to greater perspicacity than his own, is a real dramatic invention. This is Wycherley's own idea: his debt to

Calderón's *Maestro de Danzar* is, on the whole, very slight.

In spite of its merits, however, the play failed, and the reason is not far to seek. Matters began to go wrong, I conceive, when Hippolita, in the fourth act, suddenly refuses to run away with Gerrard—with no possible motive except that of furnishing the playwright with a fifth act. Then in the fifth act, the behaviour of Monsieur becomes too imbecile for tolerance; and the irruption of Flirt and Flounce, with the long and utterly preposterous negotiation between Monsieur and Flirt (a sort of topsy-turvy social essay) must have decided the failure.

In fear, perhaps, lest the play should be considered too refined, Wycherley introduced in Act IV an episode of irrelevant indecency in Prue's attempted seduction of Monsieur. Nothing leads up to it, and nothing ensues from it. Cut it out, and you would leave no perceptible gap. Like Etherege's scene at the Bear Tavern, it has reappeared in many modern French and Anglo-French farces.

Macaulay has been much derided for saying that "Wycherley's indecency is protected against the critics as a skunk is protected against the hunters. It is safe because it is too filthy to handle and too noisome even to approach." But of *The Country Wife* this is literally true. There is one side of it, at any rate, which one cannot even investigate technically, since its technical merits depend upon the answer to questions which it is impossible to discuss.

The intrigue, however, from which the play takes its name, is not exempt from examination; and its technical merits must be pronounced very slight. The action depends entirely on Pinchwife's incredible maladroitness and stupidity; while there is no psychological coherence or consistency in Margery's* state of mind. She is now densely ignorant, and again preternaturally knowing, just as the needs of a given situation happen to dictate. Pinchwife's leaving her alone at the Exchange (Act III, Sc. 2), in order to see "if the coach be at the door," and again in the letter-scene (Act IV, Sc. 2), "whilst he goes to fetch wax and a candle," are

*It is profanation to mention her in the same breath with Molière's Agnès.

technical ineptitudes far more indefensible than Joseph Surface's much-criticised exit during the Screen Scene; and the passage (Act IV, Sc. 1) in which Margery imposes herself upon him as Alithea, and induces him to take her to Horner's, is simply an elaborate and clumsy impossibility. The coxcomb, Sparkish, is a very coarse caricature, and the scene in which Harcourt, dressed as a "Levite," passes himself off, in spite of Alithea's protests, as his own twin-brother, is extravagant to the point of puerility. The women's drinking-bout in the last scene adds a finishing touch to the loathsomeness of what is surely the most bestial play in all literature.

Beside it *The Plain Dealer* seems almost sweet and clean; but it is technically misshapen beyond the rest of its kindred. Its first two acts consist of laboured, verbose talk, serving only to show that Olivia has (not inexcusably) betrayed her surly brute of a lover. In the third act the action stands absolutely still, while we are treated to a panorama of Westminster Hall, centring around the Jonsonian "humour" of the Widow Blackacre and her hopeful son—an episode wholly irrelevant to the main plot. In the fourth and fifth acts we have a conventional intrigue turning upon a woman dressed up as a man and a substitution of persons in the dark—the sort of intrigue which it is easy to elaborate to any extent, if you can get your audience to swallow the fundamental impossibilities. The satire of the play is sometimes coarsely effective, but dramatically I regard it as Wycherley's feeblest.

The history of Congreve's plays and their varying fortunes proves, I think, that technique is not a matter of temporary convention, but is, rightly understood, a fundamental factor in the dramatist's art. This is, indeed, apparent the moment we agree upon a rational definition of the term. The critics who profess to disparage technique are usually confounding it with some system of artifice which has a local and temporary vogue. Rightly understood, technique means simply the handling of dramatic material in such a

way as to seize and hold the attention of an audience and to give it a high degree of that pleasure which the theatre is specially fitted to impart. A good technician is one who thoroughly understands the psychology of his audience; and though audiences obviously differ from age to age and from place to place, there are certain basic principles which are universally valid. No one pretends, of course, that technique is everything. Many plays have, in virtue of other merits, lived down great technical defects. But initial success or failure is very apt to be determined almost entirely on grounds of technique; and that, I think, is the reason why *The Old Bachelor* and *Love for Love*, comparatively trivial plays, were brilliant successes, while *The Double Dealer* and *The Way of the World*, far abler and more ambitious works, were failures on their first production.

I am far from implying that *The Old Bachelor* and *Love for Love* were technical masterpieces. The truth is that Congreve never showed the smallest skill in the handling of his material; but in his first and third comedies he hit upon themes so simple that little or no art was required for their effective presentation, while in his second and fourth plays his themes were so complex that only the finest constructive art could have kept them clear and comprehensible.

It would take far too long to justify this criticism in detail.* But I must indicate in a few words what I conceive to be the crucial differences between the plays.

In *The Old Bachelor* (1693) we have two farces and three comedies running side by side, with scarcely any intermingling. The Bellmour-Fondlewife-Lœtitia plot and the Wittol-Bluffe-Sharper plot are mere commonplaces of the Jacobean stage: the citizen befooled by the courtier, and the rustic simpleton (Etherege's Cully over again) robbed by bandits of the city. Then we have episodes of comedy in the relations of Heartwell and Sylvia, Vainlove and Araminta, Bellmour and Belinda. In all these there is no complexity, nothing that puts any strain on the attention of the audiences.

*I have tried to do so in my introduction to Congreve in the *Masterpieces of English Drama*, American Book Company, New York, 1912.

For ten minutes at the end the different streams flow together in the mock marriage of Heartwell and Sylvia, the masked marriages of Sylvia and Lucy to Wittol and Bluffe. Here a certain tax was put, not only on the credulity of the audience, but on its power of keeping clear the threads of an intricate series of deceptions. But the whole business lasted only a few minutes; and it is recorded that the successive unmasking of four beautiful women (Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Monfort and Mrs. Bowman) gave the audience such delight that they burst into a thunder of applause.

The plot of *Love for Love* (1695), while incredible enough in all conscience, is comparatively well-knit and clear. It can be comprehensibly narrated in about a page of print—I have made the experiment. This is a very good test of a workable plot. I would say to any beginner in playwriting: "Your story ought to be what the Greeks called *eusynopton*. See if you can relate it clearly in about two hundred and fifty words; and if that proves impossible, either simplify and clarify it, or (better, perhaps) scrap it."

This test, applied to *The Double Dealer* (1693), at once explains its initial failure. It takes pages on pages to narrate the plot, and a whole volume could not render it clear. Congreve started with a clever idea—that of depicting a new type of villain whose method should be to deceive people by telling them the truth. But to have succeeded in this attempt would have demanded the technical dexterity of a Scribe; and, from the technical point of view, Congreve's fingers were all thumbs. Maskwell's plots soon become so intricate as to defy, not only belief, but comprehension. Well may Lord Touchwood say in the last act: "I am confounded when I look back, and want a clue to guide me through the various mazes of unheard-of treachery." Macaulay ascribes the failure to the melodramatic horrors of the plot. "The audience," he says, "was shocked by the characters of Maskwell and Lady Touchwood. And, indeed, there is something strangely revolting in the way in which a group that seems to belong to the house of Laius or of

Pelops is introduced into the midst of the Brisks, Froths, Carelesses and Plyants." Unless Macaulay was founding on evidence unknown to me, I take leave to doubt this account of the matter. I do not believe that the audiences of that day were capable of being shocked, but I am sure that they were capable of being bored and bewildered by an intrigue of such insane over-complexity.

It is well-known that Congreve's undoubted masterpiece, *The Way of the World* (1700), was almost as great a failure as *The Double Dealer;* and the reason, I think, was the same—clumsy over-elaboration of plot. We have in the first place to master a very complex set of relationships, licit and illicit, between the persons of the play; and that done, we find it extremely difficult to bear in mind, from moment to moment, the motives of all concerned. That this obscurity was the real cause of failure, in the case both of *The Double Dealer* and *The Way of the World,* is, I think, apparent from the fact that both plays lived down their inauspicious start and were popular throughout the eighteenth century. When a play has any qualities which invite revival, and especially when its author has attained the position of a classic, people no longer trouble much about its technical merits or defects, for which they are, indeed, more or less prepared in advance. A well-constructed play, however, has not only a better chance of initial acceptance, but continues to give more unmixed pleasure. Bad technique, even if not necessarily fatal, is always an Achilles-heel which tends to the shortening of life.

Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve are, to my thinking, the typical dramatists of the Restoration; for though Congreve's last play appeared forty years after that event, he belongs characteristically to the seventeenth, not to the eighteenth, century. He marks the end of an old order, not the beginning of a new; whereas Farquhar and Steele, of whom I shall speak in my next lecture, show the efforts of a new humanity to release itself from the brazen cynicism of what may be called the Stuart period. But there is one notable figure—Sir John Vanbrugh— whom it is difficult to allot

definitively to either group. His only entirely original plays, however, belong in date to the seventeenth century, *The Relapse* having been produced in 1696, *The Provok'd Wife* in 1697; and though some glimmerings of a new spirit appear in them, they are not sufficiently distinct to mark him off in any decisive way from the men of the Restoration. He had less wit and more humour than his three predecessors; his work is not quite so dry and hard as theirs; but Jeremy Collier certainly did him no wrong in calling him up for judgment along with them.

The two plots of *The Relapse*, though wholly unconnected, are absolutely clear, and one of them—the Tom Fashion and Miss Hoyden plot—is ingenious and amusing. The dialogue, except for the execrable blank-verse in which Amanda and Loveless choose to express themselves, is easier and less self-conscious than that of Congreve.* The word "wit," though mentioned in both prologue and epilogue, does not, I think, occur once in the body of the play; yet a good deal of the dialogue is really witty. There are some very nauseous passages, but the nastiness is not so ingrained as in Wycherley and Congreve. Young Fashion even shows some trace of moral scruple, and Amanda does actually resist the assault of Worthy—in whose name, be it noted, there is no suspicion of irony. As for Lord Foppington—an elaboration of Cibber's Sir Novelty Fashion—he is far the best fop of the whole period. There is even a touch of race in him; at all events, he is more credible and less loathsome than most of his kindred. The scene of his toilet, in which he ignores his newly-returned brother, while he gives himself over into the hands of his tailor, his shoemaker, his hosier and his perruquier, shows the fop in action, whereas the scene from Etherege, so highly praised by Mr. Gosse, merely shows the fop in highly improbable speech. One passage from Vanbrugh's scene is delightfully humorous and at the same time true to nature:

Foppington. Hark thee, shoemaker, these shoes a'n't ugly, but they don't fit me.

*The actors, says Cibber, found Vanbrugh easier to memorise than any of his contemporaries.

Shoemaker. My lord, methinks they fit you very well.
Foppington. They hurt me just below the instep.
Shoemaker. (*Feeling his foot.*) My lord, they don't hurt you there.
Foppington. I tell thee, they pinch me execrably.
Shoemaker. My lord, if they pinch you, I'll be bound to be hang'd, that's all.
Foppington. Why, wilt thou undertake to persuade me I cannot feel?
Shoemaker. Your lordship may please to feel what you think fit; but that shoe does not hurt you—I think I understand my trade—
Foppington. Now, by all that's great and powerful, thou art an incomprehensible coxcomb; but thou makest good shoes, and so I'll bear with thee.
Shoemaker. My lord, I have worked for half the people of quality in town these twenty years; and 'tis very hard I should not know when a shoe hurts, and when it don't.

Of *The Provok'd Wife* I said something in my first lecture. It is one of the most malodorous plays of the time, which is saying a great deal, and it has no special merit either of conception or of manipulation. *The Confederacy* is a spirited play, but a mere adaptation from the French. *A Journey to London,* which Vanbrugh left unfinished, might have proved his best play. Two years after his death (that is to say in 1728) Cibber worked it up into *The Provok'd Husband,* one of the most popular, and certainly one of the best, comedies of its period. Though Cibber was only seven years younger than Vanbrugh, and had actually begun to write in 1696, before Collier took the field, the mere process of time had effected such a change in manners that *The Provok'd Husband* shows scarcely a trace of Restoration brutality. Vanbrugh's fragment was cleaner and humaner than most of his other work, and Cibber still further cleansed and humanised it—thereby earning the scorn of Leigh Hunt, who reproached him with "dull vanity and time-serving self-love," because he introduced a couple of gentlemen and a lady into his play. Where he did, perhaps, merit reproach was in abandoning Vanbrugh's attempt to interweave the

two plots, and leaving them to run side by side without ever really touching.

It is, on the whole, a just discrimination which has set Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh apart from the other comic dramatists of their period.* They had all a certain literary gift which was denied to such writers as Shadwell and Crowne. Yet there are times, as I have already said, when the lesser writers afford us a momentary refreshment, by getting into touch with something like real life as distinct from the artificial, self-conscious world of wits, fops and drabs from which the more pretentious playwrights scarcely ever emerged. Their realism was crude, coarse and brutal enough, and their technique was, as a rule, conspicuous by its absence; but their plays are sometimes historical or sociological documents of considerable value. They are nearer to the Elizabethans than their better-known contemporaries. Shadwell's *Squire of Alsatia*, for example, is pure Ben Jonson. The theme of this play is that of the *Adelphi* of Terence. Chapman had used it in *All Fools* and Cumberland was to use it again, eighty years later in *The Cholerick Man*. It is curious to compare these four versions of the story, and interesting, though far from surprising, to find that Shadwell's is immeasurably the coarsest and most brutal.

Crowne was, I think, a man of more innate ability than Shadwell. His *Sir Courtly Nice*, founded on a Spanish original, is by no means a bad piece of extravagant foolery. It is interesting to note that he read the first three acts to Charles II just before his death, and that the Merry Monarch thought them "not merry enough. Sir Courtly Nice, though

*Sir Charles Sedley ought not to be omitted from this group. His *Mulberry Garden*, produced four years later than Etherege's *Love in a Tub*, has less animal spirits in its comic scenes, but is, if anything, a little less tedious in its "heroic" passages. His *Bellamira*, on the other hand, is one of the most vigorously nauseous plays of its time. Despite its scabrous subject, the *Eunuchus* of Terence is like a runnel of clear water in comparison with the well-fed, mantling sewer into which Sedley transformed it. Here and there, however, there is real comic force in his work. A scene between Merryman and Thisbe in Act III seems to have supplied Congreve with the germ of his famous compact between Mirabel and Millamant; and the scene at the end (elaborated from Terence) in which Smoothly draws Dangerfield's character is an excellent piece of cynical comedy. With formal "wit," too, Sedley was well-provided: for example, "The great pleasure of gaming were lost if we saw one another's hands; and of love, if we knew one another's hearts." *The Grumbler*, Sedley's excellent translation of *Le Grondeur* of Brueys & Palaprat, was not produced until fifty years after his death. It is significant that this gay and sparkling character-farce, crystal-clear and brimful of comic invention, apparently made no appeal to the vitiated taste of the sixteen-nineties.

he gives the play its name, has, in fact, quite a small part. Though held up to ridicule for his extravagant fastidiousness, he has in reality a touch of refinement in his composition. When, in the third act, he is made sick by the sheer beastliness of the drunken Surly, one can only say, "Small blame to him!"

An enthusiastic admirer of the genius of Mrs. Aphra Behn has lately edited, with much erudition, an *édition de luxe* of her works. "In her own day," he says, "probably for reasons purely political, a noisy clique assailed her on the score of impropriety"; which is as much as though one were to say that, for reasons purely political, Mistress Eleanor Gwynn was suspected of being no better than she should be. After referring to what he calls a "jaded couplet" from Pope,* this champion of slandered innocence proceeds: "The pinchbeck sobriety of later times was unable to tolerate her freedom. She was condemned in no still small voice as immoral, loose, scandalous; and writer after writer, leaving her unread, reiterated the charge." I have not left her unread—I have read her plays, which alone concern me—and I do not hesitate to call them the most worthless stuff that ever pretended to take rank as dramatic literature. Mrs. Centlivre is a genius by comparison.

Before concluding let me revert for a moment to my initial theory of the two elements in drama, which I defined as "faithful or would-be faithful imitation and wilful, sometimes hysterical, exaggeration." We have seen that in Restoration tragedy the latter element prevailed to the exclusion of almost everything else: it was "bombast, bombast all the way," rising at frequent intervals to sheer hysteria. In comedy, then, did the element of imitation assert itself more effectively? A little more, no doubt,—that was inevitable. It professed to put on the stage, not Almanzors, Alexanders and Belvideras, but contemporary men and women, like those who thronged the streets, the parks, the coffee-houses and the theatre itself. And it did, here and

†The stage how loosely does Astræa tread,
Who fairly puts all characters to bed.
Imitation of Horace.

there, make some approach to sober imitation—but only here and there. Over-emphasis, over-colouring, gross and palpable exaggeration was the law of its being; and it attained its effects by the use of a sort of rhetoric almost as far from the truth of human speech as the rants of the tragedians. Even its masterpiece, Millamant, is a lyrical creation, by many degrees removed from reality. She stands out from her surroundings because the exaggeration, in her case, happens to take the direction of exquisiteness: she is the one thing of beauty in a realm of repulsiveness. It is characteristic that Charles II should have found *Sir Courtly Nice* not sufficiently "merry." Continuous merriment, ranging from the giggle to the guffaw, was the one thing aimed at—the effect, in a word, which we of today demand, not from comedy, but from farce. The smile of intellectual recognition was systematically postponed to the laughter evoked by gross absurdity. There was, no doubt, a certain appeal to nature, but it was to nature deliberately and systematically denaturalised. How much delicacy of observation went to the making of a "merry" comedy we may judge from the fact that Wycherley, Congreve and Farquhar all scored their first successes with plays written almost or quite in their teens, before they could possibly have any competent and first-hand knowledge of the manners they professed to depict.

Here again, as in the case of tragedy, we may appeal for corroboration to contemporary accounts of the triumphs of acting. Listen to Colley Cibber's description of James Nokes, the great comedian of his young days, the original of Sir Nicholas Cully in *Love in a Tub* and Sir Oliver Cockwood in *She Wou'd if she Cou'd:*

> In the Ludicrous Distresses, which by the Laws of Comedy, Folly is often involv'd in, he sunk into such a mixture of piteous Pusillanimity, and a Consternation so ruefully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you to a Fatigue of Laughter, it became a moot point whether you ought not to have pity'd him. When he debated any matter by himself, he would shut up his Mouth with a dumb studious Powt, and roll his full Eye into such a vacant Amazement, such a palpable Ignorance of what to think of

it, that his silent Perplexity (which would sometimes hold him several Minutes) gave your Imagination as full Content as the most absurd thing he could say upon it. . . . What Tragedy ever shew'd us such a Tumult of Passions rising at once in one Bosom! or what buskin'd Heroe standing under the Load of them could have more effectually mov'd his Spectators by the most pathetick Speech, than poor miserable *Nokes* did, by this silent Eloquence and piteous Plight of his Features?*

Who does not feel that such acting as this, no doubt admirable in its way, would be utterly out of place in any modern comedy? Imagine it in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in *His House in Order*, in *Candida*, in *The Voysey Inheritance* or in *A Bill of Divorcement!* Or take, again, Cibber's picture of a coquette of the period—Mrs. Monfort as Melantha in Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode:*

The first ridiculous Airs that break from her are upon a Gallant never seen before, who delivers her a Letter from her Father recommending him to her good Graces as an honourable Lover. . . . She crumbles it at once into her Palm and pours upon him her whole Artillery of Airs, Eyes and Motion; down goes her dainty, diving Body, to the the Ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious Load of her own Attractions; then launches into a Flood of fine Language, and Compliment, still playing her Chest forward in fifty Falls and Risings, like a Swan upon waving Water; and, to complete her Impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own Wit, that she will not give her Lover Leave to praise it.†

That such a performance might be very delightful, no one who remembers that greatest of comic actresses, Ada Rehan, can doubt; but clearly it does not represent any character observed in nature. Its coquetry is amplified, distended, immeasurably bombasted out, like heroism in Dryden's Almanzor or passion in Lee's Alexander.

*Cibber's *Apology*, ed. Lowe, Vol. I, p. 143.
†*Ibid*, Vol. I, p. 168.

VIII

It would be a curious exercise for a gentleman of leisure to write a history of the word "sentimental," and collect instances of its loose and meaningless application. For the past half-century—I think from the early days of George Meredith onward—it has become a vague term of abuse which everyone has been free to hurl at everything, not obviously cynical, that he or she happened to dislike. It does not occur to our young supermen—who are often old enough to know better—that cynicism itself is only sentimentalism gone bad.

In the absence of a complete history of the word, I speak rather by guess; but I am inclined to think that the phrase with which we are here concerned—"sentimental comedy"—came into use about a hundred and fifty years ago. We know that Goldsmith's two comedies were written in conscious reaction against a "sentimental" school which was then in vogue, and which had scored a success in Hugh Kelly's *False Delicacy*. I fancy it is only in later times that the origin of that school has been thrown back to the beginning of the century, Steele being designated its founder, and even Cibber accused of adhering to it.* Be this as it may, it is a pity that the term "sentimental" should have been so commonly associated with the style of work which came in with the gradual humanising of manners that followed the saturnalia of the Restoration. Whoever is responsible for that association did a great disservice to common sense by stamping with a disparaging epithet what was merely the admission of ordinary good feeling into a realm in which the most brutal cynicism had held absolute sway. That the eighteenth century was a declining age in comedy no one denies; but the decline, as I hope to show you, was due to quite other causes than the prevalence of sentiment.

*Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*, Vol. III, p. 493.

The tide is usually said to have turned with the appearance, in March 1698, of Jeremy Collier's *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage.* But Collier's book was rather a symptom than the cause of a revulsion of feeling. At least one "Society for the Reformation of Manners" had been active for several years before Collier wrote. The comparative decency of the court of William and Mary was not without its effect; and the very mild homage paid to virtue in Colley Cibber's first play, produced two years before Collier's book, is said to have been a result of one of Queen Mary's proclamations against vice and immorality. On the other hand, no obvious change for the better immediately followed the appearance of Collier's tractate. Vanbrugh's *Provok'd Wife* was produced in the following month, and the three succeeding years saw the appearance of Congreve's *Way of the World* and Farquhar's first plays, in which, assuredly no heed was paid to "the parson's" diatribe.

What, now, are we to say of this most famous document in the history of the English stage? Among sensible men, whether of his own or of subsequent ages, there never has been the slightest doubt that Collier was substantially in the right, and did yeoman's service to good feeling and good manners. He harmed his case, no doubt, by his pedantry, his lack of historic sense, and his fanatical views as to the sanctity of the clerical calling and everything connected with it. "He blames Congreve," says Macaulay, "for using the words 'martyr' and 'inspiration' in a light sense; as if an archbishop might not say that a speech was inspired by claret or that an alderman was a martyr to the gout." But Macaulay is a little less than just in the implication conveyed in the following passage: "Nor does he confine this benefit of clergy to the ministers of the Established Church. He extends the privilege to Catholic priests, and, what in him is more surprising, to Dissenting preachers. This, however, is a mere trifle. Imaums, Brahmins, priests of Jupiter, priests of Baal, are all to be held sacred." Here the critic somewhat misrepresents Collier's point: it is not exactly

that these reverend personages must be held sacred, but that the insults levelled by the dramatists, ostensibly at heathen priesthoods, were in reality aimed at all religion and especially at the Christian clergy. I am far from denying, however, that Collier's sense of proportion deserts him when he gets on the subject of religion. He is outraged, for instance, when Congreve's Valentine, in his assumed madness, says, "I am Truth, I am Truth," seeing in the words a profane parody of Christ's saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." No reasonable man can possibly suspect that any such idea was in Congreve's mind.

But on the subject of morality and good manners Collier writes throughout like a man of sense and breeding. Nearly every shaft goes home; and he would have been a bad marksman had it been otherwise, for the evils at which he aimed were only too gross and palpable. Like everyone who touches the subject—like myself among the rest—he was under the disadvantage of being unable to quote the incriminated passages. He writes:

> I hope the Reader does not expect that I should set down Chapter and Page, and give him the Citations at length. To do this would be a very Unacceptable and Foreign Employment. Indeed, the Passages, many of them, are in no Condition to be handled: He that is desirous to see these Flowers, let him do it in their own Soil.

I need not give specimens of his strictures: to do so would be to go over ground we have already traversed. I will only say that he sums the matter up conclusively and incontestably when he writes:

> The Stage seldom gives Quarter to any Thing that's serviceable or Significant, but persecutes Worth and Goodness under every Appearance. He that would be safe from their Satyr must take care to disguise himself in Vice and hang out the *Colours* of Debauchery.*

And it is this literature which our latter-day æsthetes take pleasure in getting actors and actresses to recite on the stage in all its pristine nauseousness!

**Short View*, fourth ed., 1699, pp. 3 and 145.

Our business today is rapidly to survey the transition to a somewhat wholesomer state of things, accompanied, unfortunately, by a decline in sheer literary power, and little or no advance in technical ingenuity and skill.

Sir Richard Steele has usually been set down as the inventor of the deplorable "sentimental" comedy which gradually silenced the coruscating wit of Wycherley and Congreve. Some people claim the honour for Colley Cibber.* Sir Adolphus Ward reconciles the two views when he says that Steele "took a hint from Colley Cibber, who so carefully watched the currents of the public taste, and became the real founder of that Sentimental Comedy which during a long period . . . exercised so strong and, on the whole, so far from salutary an influence upon the progress of our dramatic literature." For my part, as I have already hinted, I reject as essentially misleading the term "sentimental comedy"; I maintain that sentiment has nothing to do with the admission into comedy of some approach to decency in speech, feeling and conduct; and I suggest that a far abler playwright than either Cibber or Steele would have been recognised, had he not died at the age of twenty-nine, as the true harbinger of the better order of things. That playwright was George Farquhar.

In point of date, Cibber certainly had the start of Farquhar. His first two comedies were produced in 1696 and 1697 respectively, while Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle* did not see the light until December 1698. It is also true that Steele's first comedy, produced in 1701, preceded by a year *The Twin Rivals*, the first play in which Farquhar shows himself in marked reaction against Restoration cynicism. It is impossible, therefore, to call him the actual initiator of the reaction; but I think he fell in with it of his own motive, and not by way of imitation; while there can be no doubt that in talent and influence he stood easily first among the men of the new century. What I wish to insist is that Leigh Hunt inadvertently did him an injustice in binding him up

*See De Witt C. Croissant, *Studies in the Works of Colley Cibber*, Kansas University Humanistic Studies, Vol. I, No. 1, 1912.

with Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh in that famous volume which Macaulay reviewed under the heading of *Comic Dramatists of the Restoration.* He belonged characteristically, not to the Restoration, but to the rebellion against it.

The rebellion is certainly not very apparent in *Love and a Bottle*, a ribald production which he dashed off during his first months in London. It was an improvisation by a raw Irish boy, who happened to have in him what the French call "the gift of the theatre." It was a mere imitation, rather of Aphra Behn than of Congreve. We can scarcely be wrong in regarding it as, consciously or unconsciously, autobiographical. Roebuck, the hero, is a young Irishman, overflowing with animal spirits and animal passions, who finds himself landed in London without a penny, falls in with a friend who supplies him with clothes and money, and at once plunges with irrepressible zest into a whirl of amatory adventures. We need not go so far as to imagine that the adventures actually befell the author. At all events we may be sure that he was not followed from Ireland by a virtuous young lady of property (Leanthe) masquerading, for love of him, in male attire. It is evident that the astounding and inextricable imbroglio of disguises and surprises in which the comedy ends never happened on this planet, to Farquhar or anyone else. The unbridled licentiousness of the hero verges upon insanity; and for the rest he is an accomplished model of the type known in latter-day slang as the "bounder." Yet even amid this boyish bravado of vice, we find a consciousness of the possibility, even an admission of the desirability, of better things, which we shall look for in vain in Wycherley or Congreve. "Wild as wind and unconfined as air," says Leanthe of Roebuck, "yet I may reclaim him. His follies are weakly founded upon the principles of honour, where the very foundation helps to undermine the structure.* How charming would virtue look in him, whose behaviour can add a grace to the unseemliness of vice!" Leanthe's estimate is naturally biassed; but it is

*Leanthe, like her creator, is Irish.

possible for impartial criticism to find in Roebuck a sort of rollicking good-nature that is not wholly unsympathetic.

Farquhar's second play, *The Constant Couple* (1699), was an unprecedented success, and made the young author famous. Its hero, Sir Harry Wildair, stands on almost as low a moral level as Roebuck. He is undeniably a reprobate, a son of chaos, inadmissible in any moral order. But at the same time there is a grace, a humanity, a lightness of touch in his portraiture which distinguishes him for the better from the ferocious, cast-iron libertines of Wycherley and Congreve. The type is not original. It is sketched in Etherege's Sir Frederick Frollick, and other precedents could be cited. But Farquhar breathed into it a new and enduring vitality. He gave it a touch of bravery, a touch of race, above all, a touch of humour, that still appeals to us. We feel that Sir Harry's faults arise from thoughtlessness, not from wickedness in the grain. Here is a character which does, indeed, lend some colour to Lamb's defence of Restoration Comedy. In a non-moral fairyland, Sir Harry would be an agreeable sprite; whereas no abrogation of moral law could render Wycherley's or Congreve's heroes other than detestable. And Sir Harry, I repeat, shows Farquhar almost at his worst. Even in the two plays in which he figures (for he gives his name to a continuation of *The Constant Couple*) we find a character of a much higher type. Colonel Standard is a man with some approach to decent instincts, as we now conceive them. He is a bluff, honest soldier, not a saint, but still less a blackguard. His portraiture, I think, gives clear evidence of an innate delicacy of feeling (to rank it no higher) denied to the playwrights of the earlier generation.

In *The Twin Rivals* (December 1702), Farquhar definitely broke with the Restoration tradition, and produced a play in which the good-fellows, Hermes Would-be and Trueman, are pitted against the crew of debauchees and scoundrels—Benjamin Would-be, Richmore, Subtleman and Mrs. Mandrake—and actually come off with flying colours. The moral tone of the play is aptly epitomised in this little

passage in which the two heroines discuss the character of Trueman:

Constance. Are you sure he's well-bred?
Aurelia. I tell you he's good-natured, and I take good manners to be nothing but a natural desire to be easy and agreeable to whatever conversation we fall into; and a porter with this is mannerly in his way, and a duke without it has but the breeding of a dancing-master.

Such an utterance points forward to the nineteenth century rather than backward to the seventeenth. In the third act of the same play, the scene between Hermes Would-be and Fairbank is conceived in a spirit of rectitude and kindliness quite unknown to Farquhar's compeers and rivals.

The ethical standards of Farquhar's two remaining plays, *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux' Stratagem*, cannot, certainly, be called high; but there is in both a general tone of humanity which is far above the level of the preceding age, and even above that of Farquhar's earlier plays, down to, and including, *Sir Harry Wildair*. Captain Plume, though a loose-living soldier, belongs rather to the company of Fielding's Tom Jones than to that of Wycherley's Horner or Manly, Congreve's Bellmour or Vainlove, Vanbrugh's Loveless or Worthy. As for the two heroes of *The Beaux' Stratagem*, adventurers though they be, they are neither wholly brutal nor wholly unscrupulous. Aimwell, indeed, voluntarily foregoes the fruits of his intrigue, and confesses his impersonation, in the moment of success—a trait of conscience inconceivable in the typical hero of the Restoration. Sir Adolphus Ward* writes of this play: "Some of the incidents are dubious, including one at the close—a separation by mutual consent which throws a glaring light on the view taken by the author and his age of the sanctity of the marriage tie." I venture to suggest that what is here set down to Farquhar's discredit is, in fact, a remarkable proof of the increasing earnestness of his outlook upon life. We have in this comedy a serious and very damaging criticism

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of the conventional view that there can be no immorality in marriage save breach of the marriage vow. The scenes between Mrs. Sullen and Dorinda at the end of Act III and between Squire Sullen and Sir Charles Freeman at the beginning of Act V, are a plea for what Farquhar regarded, rightly or wrongly, as a more rational law of divorce. We may or may not think the plea a sound one; but it is certain that a serious discussion of the ethics of divorce was a homage to the idea of marriage which Wycherley, Congreve or Vanbrugh would never have dreamt of paying. Where marriage constitutes no bond, divorce can have no function.

I am regretfully compelled to differ from Sir Adolphus Ward at almost every point in his estimate of Farquhar. The critic says: "While his morality is no better than that of the most reckless of his contemporaries, he has a coarseness of fibre which renders him less endurable than some of these are to a refined taste." I have tried to show that his morality is distinctly above the general Restoration level, and grows progressively better through his brief career. As to his being "less endurable" than his contemporaries, I can only say that my experience is exactly the reverse. Farquhar gives me far more pleasure than any other playwright of his time. His coarseness is (to my thinking) much less nauseous than that of Wycherley and Congreve, and he is a far better dramatist and better writer than Cibber or Steele. He obviously and admittedly brought a breath of fresh air into comedy by taking it into the country, away from the purlieus of St. James's and Covent Garden; and even when he remained in town, he moved in a wholesome and genial climate as compared with the black, bitter and cruel atmosphere that weighs upon the works of his predecessors.

Much might be said, if time permitted, of Farquhar's technique. Notably in advance of his age he was not; but he has, more than any of his contemporaries, except perhaps Vanbrugh, the dramatist's great gift of keeping the action moving. In soliloquies he is unusually sparing; but he makes rather wanton use of that far more inartistic labour-

saving device, the aside. For instance, in a short scene between Sir Harry Wildair and Angelica (Act II, Sc. 2) twenty lines are spoken aside and only eleven aloud. It is noteworthy that *The Twin Rivals,* his least successful play, is the only one in which he attempts anything serious in the way of plot. It is, in fact, like Congreve's *Double Dealer,* rather a melodrama than a comedy; and Farquhar failed, as Congreve did, because he had not the skill to handle a complex intrigue plausibly. Like Congreve, he tried to make his play "regular," as the phrase then went, by confining the action to a single day—and thereby making it merely incredible. Along with other playwrights of the period, he seems to have been seized with a fit of what may be called premature technical ambition. They had the desire without the power to become accomplished craftsmen. That he was dissatisfied with the slovenly triviality of the actions usually presented appears from a little passage in this play in which Mr. Comic, a dramatist, tells Benjamin Would-be that he "has a play just finished, but that he wants a plot for 't"

To this remark Benjamin Would-be replies, "A plot! You should read the Italian and Spanish plays, Mr. Comic"—possibly alluding to Cibber's pseudo-Spanish comedy of intrigue, *She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not,* which had been produced a few weeks earlier. In the prologue to this lively piece, Cibber lays down some excellent maxims. For instance:

> For rules are but the posts that mark the course
> Which way the rider should direct his horse.
> He that mistakes his ground is eas'ly beat,
> Tho' he that runs it true mayn't do the feat.

Nothing could be sounder or better put than this. "His wit," the playwright goes on, speaking of himself,—

> His *wit,* if any, mingles with his plot,
> Which should on no temptation be forgot:
> His *action's* in the time of acting done,
> No more than from the curtain, up and down.
> While the first *music* plays, he moves his scene
> A little space, but never shifts again.

> From his design no *person* can be spar'd,
> Or speeches lopt, unless the whole be marr'd:
> No scene(s) of talk for talking's sake are shewn,
> Where most abruptly, when their chat is done,
> Actors go off, because the *poet*—can't go on.

Except in so far as they declare for a pedantic adherence to the unities of time and place, these maxims might have been accepted by Francisque Sarcey as defining, in part at any rate, the "well-made play." And it must be owned that in *She Wou'd and She Wou'd Not* Cibber lived up to them tolerably well. It is a sort of half-way house between Fletcher and Scribe. But, though I do not know its Spanish source, to that, and not to Cibber, we may pretty safely attribute the deft handling of the plot. His original plays show no such faculty; and in one of them, *Woman's Wit,* or *The Lady in Fashion* (1697), he signally failed precisely as Congreve had failed four years earlier in *The Double Dealer* and as Farquhar was to fail five years later in *The Twin Rivals*—because he attempted a complex intrigue which he had not the skill to render acceptable, and because, moreover, he hampered himself by an endeavour to make the play "regular" in respect to the unity of time, though not to that of place. All three playwrights had, to use an expressive colloquialism, "bitten off more than they could chew."

What are we to say, now, of Cibber's place as a dramatist, and especially of his share in cleansing the Augean stables of the Restoration? It is not to be denied that he gave the first stroke of the pitchfork. So long ago as 1784, Tom Davies, in his *Dramatic Miscellanies,* said "To a player we are indebted for the reformation of the stage. The first comedy, acted since the Restoration, in which were preserved purity of manners and decency of language, with a due respect to the honour of the marriage-bed, was Colley Cibber's *Love's Last Shift, or The Fool in Fashion.*" The "decency of language," however, was at best comparative. Positively, the talk of Loveless, Snap and Young Worthy is very ribald; and there is an Act III, a scene of elaborate character-drawing, after the fashion of *The Plain Dealer* and *The*

School for Scandal, in which, though the interlocutors are two gentlemen emphatically called "Worthy," and two unmarried girls, both the ideas and the expressions are extraordinarily coarse. What has procured the play its reputation as a work of exalted morality is that the heroine, Amanda, whose husband, Loveless, has deserted her for ten years in order to devote himself to a course of cosmopolitan debauchery, reclaims the errant hero, who does not recognise her, by pretending to become his mistress. It shows a strange conception of "the honour of the marriage-bed" that this nauseous scene of pseudo-seduction should be accepted as paying it "due respect." Still, as compared with *The Country Wife* or *Love for Love*, the play may almost be called decent. It may be that Cibber instinctively scented a change in the wind and adapted himself to it; but he certainly does not pose as a reformer either in his dedication, his prologue, or his epilogue. He apologises, indeed, for reforming his rake at the close, pleading as an excuse that he has been "lewd for above four acts."

His second play, the unsuccessful *Woman's Wit*, though it contains one or two incredibly brutal lines, is as a whole much cleaner than *Love's Last Shift*. As this play also appeared before Collier had blown his trumpet-blast, and as it is entirely of Cibber's invention, we must in justice accept it as proof that his imagination did not set as strongly in the direction of the nauseous as did that of his older contemporaries. But he is still innocent of any zeal for dramatic sanitation.

When, in the following year, the *Short View* appeared, Cibber was far from rallying openly to Collier's side. He appears to have waited to see how the cat was jumping; for during the next six years he produced no original work, but only, in 1701, a re-hash of two of Fletcher's plays, called *Love Makes a Man* and, in 1702, the before-mentioned comedy from the Spanish. In his next original effort, *The Careless Husband* (1704) he introduced a jibe at Collier in the following passage:

Lady Betty Modish. Lampoons and plays, madam, are only things to be laughed at.

Lord Morelove. Plays now, indeed, one need not be so much afraid of; for since the late short-sighted view of 'em, vice may go on and prosper; the stage dares hardly show a vicious person speaking like himself, for fear of being call'd prophane for exposing him.

Lady Easy. 'Tis hard, indeed, when people won't distinguish what's meant for contempt, and what for example.

Lady Easy's remark is very just in general, but is the most barefaced sophistry when applied to the particular case of Restoration comedy. The whole passage, indeed, is as insincere as it is shallow. There can be no doubt that Cibber was speaking his honest opinion when he said in his *Apology* (Chap. VIII):

> It has often given me Amazement, that our best Authors of that time could think the Wit and Spirit of their Scenes could be an Excuse for making the Looseness of them publick. The many Instances of their Talents so abused, are too glaring to need a closer Comment, and are sometimes too gross to be recited.

It was probably some instinct of *esprit de corps* that induced Cibber, in *The Careless Husband*, to gird at Collier; for the whole play leaves no doubt that he knew the cat to be jumping to the side of decency. It presents an astonishing contrast to *Love's Last Shift*, not to mention such plays as Farquhar's *Constant Couple* or Congreve's *Way of the World*, which had preceded it by only five and four years respectively. Indeed it is much less coarse than Farquhar's *Recruiting Officer* and *Beaux' Stratagem*, which followed it. If not in its incidents, at all events in its dialogue it may almost be called a piece of marivaudage; and as the incidents bear a very small proportion to the dialogue, its general effect is one of something approaching to refinement. The same may be said of its pendant or counterpart, *The Lady's Last Stake*, produced in 1707. One or two very gross passages in the last act show that the old Adam had not been entirely expelled; but these two plays, which were

highly popular in their time, are certainly among the earliest and most unmistakable evidences of the dawn of a new age.

Their technical quality is a little hard to define. They are by no means negligible: one is tempted to say that, if they were better written, they would be very good. In both there are the usual two plots, but in both they are better interwoven than usual. Both preach the now highly discredited doctrine that it is woman's duty, or at all events her wisest policy, to be very tolerant of masculine delinquencies. The angelic self-control of Lady Easy in the earlier comedy entirely reclaims the very much more than "careless" Sir Charles; while the nagging jealousy of Lady Wronglove in the later play is on the point of leading to disaster, when she is persuaded by Sir Friendly Moral—surely the masterpiece of absurdity in names—to alter her tactics and seek reconciliation. *The Careless Husband* opens with a brilliantly dramatic passage—perhaps the best that Cibber ever wrote—but the amours of Lord Morelove and Lady Betty Modish are conducted in scenes of mere talk which have all the prolixity of Mr. Bernard Shaw's later manner, without his wit. In *The Lady's Last Stake*, that part of the action which gives the play its title belongs rather to melodrama than to comedy. A dissolute sprig of nobility (Lord George Brilliant by name) plots with a confederate card-sharper to cheat Lady Gentle of two thousand pounds at piquet, in order that he may take the basest advantage of her indebtedness to him. His amiable scheme is, indeed, foiled; but he is consoled with the hand of a fairly agreeable and very spirited heiress. The most original thing in the play is the character of Miss Notable, an accomplished specimen of the genus minx.

Cibber himself quotes with good-humoured acceptance a saying of Congreve's that *Love's Last Shift* "had in it a great many things that were *like* wit, but in reality were *not* wit." His later plays are rather lacking even in things that look like wit. His dialogue is cumbrous and wordy, rising at best to a certain sprightliness. But he deserves to be better known than he is. It is significant of latter-day

tendencies that there should be no modern edition of his comedies, while Mrs. Aphra Behn is glorified in an *édition de luxe.*

I have given so much time to Farquhar and Cibber that I must treat very briefly of Steele. He was, though not the earliest, the most self-conscious and deliberate rebel against the Restoration convention. His whole dramatic work falls within the eighteenth century and represents a more advanced civilisation than that of Whitehall under Charles and James. The trouble with Steele is that he is not a born dramatist, but rather an essayist or journalist, and that his writing is wholly undistinguished.* His first comedy, *The Funeral,* is full of observation, humour and good feeling, but is spoilt by the absurdity of the story and its presentment. There may be means of explaining how Lord Brumpton's return to life was so successfully kept secret, and how Lady Sharlot found her way into the coffin supposed to contain his body; but for these strange circumstances no explanation is offered. Campley's disguising himself as a woman in order to effect Lady Harriet's escape is a clumsy and conventional expedient of which the best that can be said is that nothing at all is made of it—its possibilities of offensiveness are left undeveloped. With all its defects, however, the play contains a great deal of excellent satire. Listen to this passage in which the resuscitated Lord Brumpton tries to bribe Sable, the undertaker, to keep the secret of his revival:

Sable. Why, my lord, you can't in conscience put me off so. I must do according to my orders, cut you up, and embalm you, except you'll come down a little deeper than you talk of; you don't consider the charges I've been at already.

Lord Brumpton. Charges? For what?

Sable. First, twenty guineas to my lady's woman for notice of your death (a fee I've, before now,

*His plays have never been carefully edited, and he may not be responsible for all the slovenlinesses observable in the Mermaid text.

known the widow herself to go halves in—but no matter for that). In the next place, ten pounds for watching you all your long fit of sickness last winter.

Lord Brumpton. Watching me? Why I had none but my own servants by turns.

Sable. I mean attending to give notice of your death. I had, all your long fit of sickness last winter, a fellow waiting at your gate to bring mé intelligence; but you unfortunately recovered, and I lost my obliging pains for your service.

Lord Brumpton. Ha, ha, ha! Sable, thou art a very impudent fellow; half-a-crown a day to attend my decease, and dost thou reckon it to me?

Sable. Look you, gentlemen, don't stand staring at me. I have a book at home, which I call my Doomsday book, where I have every man of quality's age and distemper in town, and know when you should drop. Nay, nay, my lord, if you had reflected upon your mortality half so much as poor I have for you, you would not desire to return to this life. In short, I cannot keep this a secret, under the whole money I am to have for burying you.

This is quite good comedy; but we feel it—do we not?—shading off into a *Tatler* or *Spectator* character-sketch. Here is a passage illustrating Steele's humanity of spirit, and showing at the same time how history repeats itself. Lord Hardy and Campley are enrolling recruits, when one presents himself in whom they recognise a soldier who has already fought under them, but has been discharged.

Campley. What! Is Matchlock come back to the Company? That's the fellow that brought me off at Steinkirk. . . . How far out of the country did you come to list? Don't you come from Cornwall? How did you bear your charges?

Matchlock. I was whipped from constable to constable—

Trim. Ay, my lord, that's due by the courtesy of England to all that want in red coats: besides, there's an Act that makes us free of all corporations, and that's the ceremony of it.

Campley. But what pretence had they for using you so ill? You did not pilfer?
Matchlock. I was found guilty of being poor.
Campley. Poor devil!

If for "red coats" we read "khaki" this passage has a strangely modern ring about it.

Steele's second play, *The Lying Lover* (1703), is only a brisk adaptation of Corneille's *Menteur,* with an interpolated scene, somewhat out of key with the rest of the play, in which Young Bookwit is punished for his loose conduct by the fear of having killed a man in a duel. Hatred of the insensate custom of duelling was one of the many points in which Steele showed his modernity of spirit.

In *The Tender Husband* (1705) we find something of a throw-back to the seventeenth century. Clerimont senior's scheme for punishing the frivolity of his wife by setting on his cast-off mistress, dressed in male attire, to make love to her, is at once preposterous and unpleasing. The play is noteworthy, however, inasmuch as Biddy Tipkin is certainly a direct ancestress of Lydia Languish, while Humphry Gubbin is one of many originals from which Goldsmith composed the figure of Tony Lumpkin.

After an interval of seventeen years, Steele returned to the stage in 1722 with *The Conscious Lovers,* founded on the romantic plot of the *Andria* of Terence. Here, if ever, he is open to the charge of writing "sentimental" comedy, but even here that term is a misnomer. The play is in reality bourgeois drama. It is the first notable work in a new style which culminated some fifty years later in Cumberland, and ran to seed in the vapid domesticities of the younger Colman, Holcroft and Morton. Certainly we are far enough from Etherege and Wycherley in such a speech as this of Indiana, addressed to Mr. Sealand, who shortly afterwards proves to be her long-lost father, but who is at this point hesitating whether to allow his other daughter, Lucinda, to marry Young Bevil:

Indiana. Let me not, miserable though I may be, do injury to my benefactor. No, sir, my treatment ought rather

> to reconcile you to his virtues. If to bestow without a prospect of return; if to delight in supporting what might perhaps be thought an object of desire, with no other view than to be her guard against those who would not be so disinterested; if these actions, sir, can in a careful parent's eye, commend him to a daughter, give yours, sir, give her to my honest, generous Bevil. What have I to do, but sigh and weep, and rave, run wild, a lunatic in chains, or, hid in darkness, mutter in distracted starts and broken accents my strange, strange story.

This sort of rhetoric "ran wild" on the stage and in fiction for over a hundred years. It drew fresh sustenance from the German romanticism which came into fashion in the late eighteenth century. Scott now and then lapsed into it; Bulwer Lytton very often; even Dickens was not exempt from its influence. But it has nothing to do with sentimental comedy: it belongs to the sphere of domestic drama, shading off into melodrama.

The real distinction of Steele, I think, is that he was, or consciously tried to be, in the modern sense of the word, a gentleman. His comedies are full of admirable little touches of delicacy and humanity. In the second act of *The Conscious Lovers,* for example, there is a scene in which Young Bevil, according to the fashion of the time (on the stage at any rate) treats Indiana to a musical interlude. A servant announces, "Sir, here's Signor Carbonelli says he waits your commands in the next room." "Desire the gentleman to walk in," says Indiana; and a Music Master enters, who, without further ceremony, performs a violin solo. Then we have this stage-direction: "After a Sonata is played, Bevil waits on the Master to the door"—and then ensues this passage between the lovers:

> *Bevil.* You smile, madam, to see me so complaisant to one whom I pay for his visit. Now I own, I think it is not enough barely to pay those whose talents are superior to our own. . . . Methinks we ought to do something more than barely gratify them for what they do at our command only because their fortune is below us.

Indiana. You say I smile. I assure you it was a smile of approbation; for, indeed, I cannot but think it the distinguishing part of a gentleman to make his superiority of fortune as easy to his inferiors as he can.

We have emerged from the age of Sir Frederick Frollick, and are approaching that of Sir Charles Grandison. This means, it may be said, that we are leaving comedy behind us; but for deeply-discerning comedy—I do not say that Steele's was such—the courtly gentleman is at least as good a subject as the raffish ribald. It is all a question of insight and skill. Think of Sir Willoughby Patterne!

Between *The Conscious Lovers* and *She Stoops to Conquer* there elapsed a period of fifty years, during which the English drama stood absolutely still. Both tragedy and comedy were simply marking time. One play might be a little less dull than another; but nothing was produced of any enduring value. Then, between 1773 and 1777, three imperishable comedies, one by Goldsmith and two by Sheridan, were added to the literature of the stage; and after that sudden effulgence, so to speak, darkness once more descended upon the scene for over a century. How are we to account, on the one hand, for the long night of one hundred and fifty (we might even say one hundred and eighty) years, and, on the other hand, for the brilliant meteors that, for a brief space, created an illusion of dawn?

The orthodox theory is that an insidious disease, a sort of phylloxera or blight, known as "sentiment," had crept into and sterilised the luxuriant vineyard of English comedy. This I hold to be a quite misleading account of the matter. The mass of the comedies produced between *The Beaux' Stratagem* and *She Stoops to Conquer* were not in the least sentimental. Where is the sentiment in the lively improvisations of Fielding and Foote? They are thin, slight, trivial, farcical, frothy, extravagant, anything else you please—but sentimental they are not. The most ambitious and successful comedies of the period were the Cibber and Vanbrugh *Provok'd Husband* (1726), Dr. Hoadley's *Suspicious Husband* (1747), George Colman's *Jealous Wife* and Arthur

Murphy's *Way to Keep Him* (both dating from 1761), and Colman and Garrick's *Clandestine Marriage* (1766). No one can pretend that these plays suffer from any excess of sentiment. It is true that in all of them the (more or less) decent characters come off best in the end; but if the triumph of vice be essential to good comedy, then there is no good comedy in the world except our Restoration masterpieces. *The Suspicious Husband,* indeed, is something very like a reversion to the pure Restoration type. A contemporary critic called it "Hoadley's profligate pantomime" and the usually sedate *Dictionary of National Biography* says that it consists of "entrances and exits through windows at night and of dissolute small-talk." But no one will pretend that it is any the better comedy for being conspicuously exempt from all suspicion of sentiment.

Another explanation of the paralysis of comedy is that its vitality was sapped by the social essay and the novel. The implication is that Steele was diverted from the stage by the *Tatler* and the *Spectator,* Fielding by *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews,* and that, but for these distractions, Steele and Fielding would have been great dramatists. There is certainly more in this theory than in the other. It is quite true that from the days of Elizabeth onwards the stage had performed the function which in later times has fallen to comic and satiric journalism, and that in the days of Anne it began to be relieved of that function. But that ought to have meant that the drama became a purer, and therefore a finer, art; whereas in practice nothing of the kind occurred. Comedy showed no consciousness of any change in conditions, but remained faithful to its old formulas. It cannot even be said that the popularity of the social essay and the novel paralysed the theatre by drawing away financial support from it. The theatre remained, on the whole, quite popular. Plays were published, and far more widely read than they are today. As for Steele and Fielding, they might have written more plays if they had written no essays or novels, but there is no reason to suppose that they would have written better plays.

What, then, is the true explanation of the admitted decline in the vitality of English Comedy? I doubt whether there is any single and simple explanation. Something we must allow to mere chance—to the fact that between Farquhar and Goldsmith no man or woman of specifically dramatic genius happened to be born into the English-speaking world. Certainly it was chance—that is to say, causes so obscure as to defy our analysis—that concentrated into one brief decade the brilliant efflorescence of Goldsmith and Sheridan. No new social, or political, or intellectual, or even theatrical conditions accounted for the appearance between 1773 and 1777 of three comedies worth all the remaining drama of the century. It just happened that two men of genius found their opportunity practically at the same time: it just happened that one of them died within a year of his triumph, and that the other's lack of character cut short his career as a playwright. If their personal circumstances had been more propitious, we might have had thirty brilliant comedies, instead of only three, from these two men. It is idle to seek to relate their sudden appearance and disappearance to any of the great currents of literary tendency.

But though we must allow something for the agency of chance, we cannot attribute to that alone so large a phenomenon as the general decline of drama during the eighteenth century. To do so would be merely to give up the riddle. Chance may account for the appearance, at a given moment, of two individual geniuses; it cannot account for the total eclipse of genius in whole generations of men both before and after.

What was fundamentally wrong with English comedy—and still more with tragedy—was, I suggest, its obstinate clinging to an outworn formula. It broke no new ground either of matter or of method. One is tempted to say, without more than an allowable spice of exaggeration, that men kept on writing the same play over and over again. And that play was the Jonsonian comedy of humours, adapted to a new century, but not cured of its fatal defect—the inevitable shallowness of its hard-and-fast type-psychology.

One thing cannot but strike us as we read the plays, or even glance at the playbills, of the eighteenth century—the almost exclusive prevalence of grotesque and impossible label-names, such as the "Sir Friendly Moral" of Cibber, to which I called your attention a moment ago. The employment of such names is a characteristic—a vice—almost peculiar to English comedy, and due to the mischievous influence of Ben Jonson. He, no doubt, found a slight tendency towards the practice in the Latin comedy—in the use of such a name as "Thraso" for a boaster. But he seized upon it and exaggerated it beyond all reason. Half his names are manufactured absurdities: Fastidious Brisk, Morose, Subtle, Truewit, Surly, Downright, Wellbred, Sir Epicure Mammon, Sir Politick Would-be, Sir Glorious Tipto, Sir Diaphanous Silkworm, Sir Amorous La Foole. A traveller must be Peregrine, a barber, Cutbeard, a poetaster, Madrigal. A variety of the same practice, only a shade less absurd, is the device of translating the labels into Italian, so frequently employed not only by Ben but by many of his contemporaries. Shakespeare, sane as always, despised such fooleries. He has a few grotesque names, such as Bottom, Quince, Snout, Mouldy, Feeble and Bullcalf, but they are not labels—they do not express the character or the calling of the personage. Sir Toby Belch, Pistol, Shallow and Silence are, I think, his only Jonsonian label-names of any importance—for Sir Oliver Martext in *As You Like It* is such an insignificant figure that he scarcely counts. A very few foreign names, such as Borachio, Parolles, Le Beau and Autolycus, show a slight tendency in the same direction; but what in Shakespeare was at most a rare peccadillo was in Jonson a systematic and devastating vice.

It is needless to point out with what eagerness the Restoration seized on this vice, as on every other. To think of Restoration comedy is to conjure up a motley rout of label-names—Sir Frederick Frollick, Sir Courtly Nice, Sir Novelty Fashion, Pinchwife, Fondlewife, Gripe, Brisk, Tattle, Scandal, Dapperwit, Manly, Sullen, Froth. Even the two

most engaging figures of the crew must have significant labels affixed to them—the man, Wildair, the lady, Millamant. What we are at present concerned to note is that, while it expelled so many other Restoration vices, the eighteenth century took over this one intact, and thereby renounced all idea of getting into intimate touch with real life—or rather confessed that no such idea had ever occurred to it. Comedy was to be concerned, not with the imitation of life at large, but with the manipulation of a set of carefully labelled puppets, moving in a highly conventionalised region, vaguely resembling the Court end of London. The evolutions of the puppets might be more or less different from play to play, but they could never get beyond a certain limited set of gestures. Penetrating psychology and subtlety of emotion were excluded by the very conditions of the case. Novelty was sought, if at all, not in the deeper exploration of the human heart, but in the tagging of some marked eccentricity to one of the stock figures—such eccentricity to be proclaimed in the label. For instance, one of the liveliest plays of the period is Murphy's *Way to Keep Him*, in which he introduces a character who is ashamed to confess his devoted love for his wife, either to the lady herself or to anyone else. There is in this material for real comedy; but when you call your character Sir Bashful Constant, and make the other leading personages of the play Lovemore and Sir Brilliant Fashion, you condemn yourself to treat it as a conventional farce. So, in *Know Your Own Mind*, Murphy's hero is a gentleman who makes advances (quite honourable) to every woman he sees, and must therefore be called Millamour. In the same play there is an allusion to a personage called Sir Volatile Vainlove. It would be folly to expect any advance towards new and serious forms of drama from a generation obsessed by such a childish trick of nomenclature.

As a matter of fact, the comedy-writers of the period—even the greatest of them—drew upon a very limited stock of motives which they were constantly re-manipulating and re-dressing. We have seen how Sheridan's scandalous col-

lege descended—through many intermediate incarnations—from Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*. We have seen how both Sheridan and Goldsmith were indebted to Steele's *Tender Husband*. I do not know whether it has ever been pointed out that the central situation of *She Stoops to Conquer* is merely an expurgated version of the central situation of Farquhar's *Constant Couple*. A whole book might be devoted to tracing scenes and characters from one comedy to another through this body of literature—but it would be a very dull book. It was a real touch of inventive genius that gave Sheridan his primacy. So far as I know, the great Screen Scene—certainly an incomparable situation—has not been traced to any original. Of course we can easily point to certain of its elements in earlier plays; but it is the elaboration of the whole that is so marvellous. And even *The Rivals* has an ingenuity and vivacity which would place it easily at the head of eighteenth-century comedy if *The School for Scandal* did not easily overtop it. The attempt to depreciate Sheridan while glorifying the men of the Restoration—to sacrifice him on the altar of Wycherley and Congreve—is one of the shallowest of literary affectations.

I confess, however, that in all this I have been re-stating rather than solving the problem that concerns us—why did the eighteenth century mark time instead of advancing? Why did it re-dress the puppets of the Restoration, instead of going forth to seek new delicacies and subtleties of imitation and interpretation? I reserve for my next lecture an attempt to find, at any rate, a partial answer to this question. For the present, I can only—going back to my initial argument—assert the fact that it was a barren and stationary period, inasmuch as it contributed nothing to that segregation of the imitative from the exaggerative element which I believe to be the true principle and criterion of progress in drama.

To make my position clearer, just let me remind you, in one final word, of what the eighteenth century did *not* do. Let me take three typical plays of our own time, and ask you to reflect upon their differences from even the three

great classics of the period we are considering—*She Stoops to Conquer, The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal.* In selecting three modern plays I suffer from an embarrassment of riches, but finally pitch upon *The Voysey Inheritance,* by Mr. H. Granville-Barker, *Strife,* by Mr. John Galsworthy, and *A Bill of Divorcement,* by Miss Clemence Dane. The first of these is a study in individual psychology, a delicately faithful presentation of a group of characters in upper middle-class life. The second is a confrontation, almost symbolic in its largeness and dignity, of the contending forces in modern economic society. The third is what we specifically call a problem play—a passionate discussion of a problem in individual conduct, and of the rightness or wrongness of the laws regulating marriage and divorce. I am not suggesting any comparison of absolute merit between the two groups of writers or the two groups of plays. I am the first to declare that Goldsmith and Sheridan were very great men, and I consider it quite probable that the three eighteenth-century comedies, as masterpieces in the art of mirth-provoking, may hold the stage long after the three modern plays have ceased to be acted. What I do suggest, and even insist, is that in the modern plays the imitation of life—both of its surface aspects and of its psychological processes—is carried to a perfection undreamt of in the seventeen-seventies. You may say that I am comparing three avowed and incontestable comedies with three plays which certainly are not comedies, whatever else they may be. But that is precisely my point. The art of scenic imitation has become a sincere, straightforward art, and has purged itself of that element of deliberate, purposive over-emphasis which had come down to it through the ages, from the time when men danced commemorative dances round a hero's tomb, or stained their faces with wine-lees, and draped their limbs in goat-skins, in honour of Dionysus. The modern dramatist does not start with a predeterminate bias towards either laughter or tears. He does not invoke either Thalia or Melpomene, but a tenth Muse—Aletheia. He reproduces, or tries to reproduce, the mingled yarn of the web of life, in

which pathos and humour inextricably intertwine. He may or may not bring to his task a genius equal to that of the great men of old; but his method is more refined, his aim is more serious, his ideal is purer than theirs. The art of the theatre is not decadent but rejuvenated, and it behoves us not to hamper it by a conventional or affected—in any case an ignorant—over-valuation of the past and depreciation of the present and future.

IX

I promised, in my last lecture, to attempt in this one a partial explanation, at any rate, of the fact that, during the eighteenth century, both comedy and tragedy stuck in the old ruts, and made little or no advance towards that elimination of exaggerative and rhetorical conventions which was the predestinate line of progress. We must look for the reasons, I believe, in material conditions. A subtler art of imitation demanded smaller theatres and better methods of lighting; and in neither of these directions did any advance take place. The drama was confined by royal letters patent to the

houses twain
Of Covent Garden and of Drury Lane,

with the Haymarket to fill the gap of the summer vacation. The patent houses were rebuilt several times, but always larger, not smaller. Being lit exclusively by candles, they were dim caverns in comparison even with the gas-lighted playhouses of the nineteenth century; while the exquisite regulation of lights rendered possible by electricity and other modern illuminants was entirely undreamt-of. The Elizabethan platform-stage survived in the shape of a large "apron" jutting out into the auditorium beyond the curtain line; and actors, in order to be thoroughly well heard and seen, habitually moved to the front of this apron, relinquishing all attempt to live, as it were, within the picture. Exaggeration then, whether comic or tragic, was necessarily the order of the day. The optics and acoustics of the theatre imperatively demanded it. Why should playwrights attempt a faithful reproduction of real character in its real environment, when they knew that the mechanism of the playhouse rendered such a thing impossible?

It is true that, in acting, frequent attempts were made at an approximation to nature. One may almost say that each

generation of actors plumed itself on being more natural than the last. Garrick was natural in comparison with Booth and Quin; Kean was natural in comparison with the Kembles. But that Garrick's naturalness was relative rather than positive we have ample evidence to show—for instance, the discussion between Johnson and Boswell with regard to his Hamlet. "Would you not, Sir," asked Boswell, "start as Mr. Garrick does if you saw a ghost?" "I hope not, Sir," replied the Sage, "for if I did I should frighten the Ghost." It is interesting, nevertheless, and it bears out my general argument, to find that, in spite of material difficulties, and in spite of the dominance of an unquestioned convention, actors of genius were constantly veering towards nature, or, in other words, towards purity and fidelity of imitation.

At the same time, the very excellence of the actors trained under the exaggerative convention was an obstacle to progress. We must not forget that the century which I presented to you in my last lecture as one of sheer stagnation, was, from another point of view, the great age of the English theatre. The names of David Garrick and Sarah Siddons are among the most illustrious in the whole history of acting. Enthusiastic criticism of acting is always to be interpreted with caution; but the evidence for the greatness of these two players is absolutely overwhelming. All Europe did homage to Garrick as the incomparable master of all branches of mimetic art; and when we read of the visible, palpable, physiological effects produced by the acting of Mrs. Siddons, we feel that there must have been a quality in it which we can in these days but faintly conceive. Byron said, "Of actors Cooke was the most natural, Kemble the most supernatural, Kean the medium between the two. But Mrs. Siddons was worth them all put together." Sir Walter Scott said, "The music of that wonderful actress's voice, looks, manner and person, produced the strongest effect which could possibly be exerted by a human being upon her fellow-creatures. Nothing of the kind that I ever witnessed approached it by a hundred degrees." He adds that in Edinburgh, when the curtain fell, "a large proportion of

the ladies were generally in hysterics." It was in Edinburgh that an involuntary tribute to her genius was paid by a very minor actor who played the Surveyor in *Henry VIII* to the great Sarah's Queen Katharine. He was met by another actor, named Russell, coming off the stage, having just received the Queen's rebuke: "You were the Duke's surveyor, and lost your office on the complaints o' the tenants." "The mimetic unjust steward was perspiring with agitation. 'What is the matter with you?' said Mr. Russell. 'The matter!' quoth the other. 'That woman plays as if the thing were in earnest. She looked me so through and through with her black eyes, that I would not for the world meet her on the stage again!'" Anecdotes abound of the startling effects she produced both on her comrades on the stage and on her audiences. The most remarkable, perhaps, is that which Macready* relates of a performance of Rowe's *Tamerlane* at which his father was present. "In the last act, when, by order of the tyrant (Bajazet), her lover Moneses is strangled before her face, she worked herself up to such a pitch of agony, and gave such terrible reality to the few convulsive words she tried to utter, that the audience for a few moments remained in a hush of astonishment, as if awestruck; they then clamoured for the curtain to be dropped, and, insisting on the manager's appearance, received from him, in answer to their vehement enquiries, the assurance that Mrs. Siddons was alive, and recovering from the temporary indisposition that her exertions had caused. They were satisfied as regarded her, but would not suffer the performance to be resumed." Still more remarkable than the effect of this performance on the general public was its effect on two seasoned actors, the elder Macready and Holman, who happened to be seated in the pit. Holman turned to his companion, when Mrs. Siddons had fallen, and, staring in his face, said, "Macready, do I look as pale as you?"

It is curious to turn to the text, and see with what words the actress produced this effect. They were these:

*Reminiscences, i, 202.

Arpasia. Oh dismal! 'tis not to be borne! ye moralists!
Ye talkers! what are all your precepts now?
Patience? distraction! Blast the tyrant, blast him
Avenging lightnings! Snatch him hence, ye fiends!
Love! Death! Moneses! Nature can no more;
Ruin is on her, and she sinks at once.

We are constantly amazed at the stuff out of which the great actors and actresses of the eighteenth century contrived to wring thrilling effects. Their virtuosity was supreme, in comedy no less than in tragedy; and it was a large-scale virtuosity suited to huge theatres and comparatively dim light. The stagnation of the drama was largely due to the fact that dramatists were practically compelled to go on supplying the actors with matter which enabled them, as it were, to revel in their own peculiar accomplishments.

There was, however, even in tragedy, an attempt to shake off the pompous trappings of convention, and to present contemporary themes in language which, if it could scarcely be called prose, was at any rate, not blank-verse. Unfortunately it was easier to get rid of metre than to get rid of bombast. Even Lee and Otway are scarcely further from nature than Lillo, whose *George Barnwell,* produced in 1731, was one of the most popular plays of the century. It is an amazingly crude and childish story (founded on a ballad) of an apprentice who, becoming entangled in the toils of a wicked woman, Millwood by name, murders his inoffensive uncle, and ends his career at Tyburn. I think a revival of this play might have some success, very much as *The Beggar's Opera* has succeeded; though its attraction would lie in its naïveté, not in its cynicism. It contains one of the most delectable examples of the aside that even the eighteenth century can supply. Barnwell is paying his first visit to the artful Millwood:

Millwood. Please, Sir, to sit. I am as much at a loss how to receive this honour as I ought, as I am surprized at your goodness in conferring it.

Barnwell. I thought you had expected me. I promised to come.

Millwood. That is the more surprizing; few men are such religious observers of their word.

Barnwell. All who are honest, are.

Millwood. To one another; but we simple women are seldom thought of consequence enough to gain a place in their remembrance.

(*Laying her hand on his, as by accident.*)

Barnwell. (*Aside.*) Her disorder is so great, she don't perceive she has laid her hand on mine. Heavens! How she trembles! What can this mean?

Was there ever such a flagrant absurdity? Yet Mr. George Moore would have us think that the first step towards the resuscitation of our moribund drama is the revival of the soliloquy and the aside.*

Other domestic dramas in prose followed *George Barnwell,* the most famous and successful being Edward Moore's five-act tragedy, *The Gamester* (1753), which must indeed have been something of a relief as compared with the *Orphans* and *Oroonokos,* the *Roman Fathers* and *Grecian Daughters,* which were its competitors for half a century and more. But its construction was extremely crude, and its style may be judged from the following passage between the villain, Stukely, and the heroine, Mrs. Beverley. Stukely, after ruining Beverley by cheating at play, calumniates him to his wife, and makes her suspect his fidelity. Then the scene proceeds:

Stukely. Redress is in your power.

Mrs. Beverley. What redress? . . .

Stukely. To be resolved is to secure it. The marriage vow, once violated, is, in the sight of Heaven, dissolved—Start not, but hear me. 'Tis now the summer of your youth: time has not cropped the roses from your cheek, though sorrow long has washed them. Then use your beauty wisely, and, freed by injuries, fly from the cruellest of men, for shelter with the kindest.

*Another very popular play of Lillo's was *The Fatal Curiosity,* in which a father and mother murder, for his riches, a traveller, who is in fact their long-lost son. This theme probably descends from antiquity (compare the lost *Cresphontes* of Euripides) and it certainly reappears incessantly—for instance, in Werner's *Der Vierundzwanzigste Februar,* and in *Lithuania,* by Rupert Brooke.

Mrs. Beverley. And who is he?

Stukely. A friend to the unfortunate; a bold one, too, who, while the storm is bursting on your brow, and lightning flashes from your eyes, dares tell you that he loves you.

Mrs. Beverley. Would that these eyes had Heaven's own lightning, that, with a look, thus I might blast thee! Am I then fallen so low? Has poverty so humbled me that I should listen to a hellish offer and sell my soul for bread? Oh, villain! villain!—But now I know thee, and thank thee for the knowledge.

Stukely. If you are wise, you shall have cause to thank me.

Mrs. Beverley. An injured husband too shall thank thee.

Stukely. Yet know, proud woman, I have a heart as stubborn as your own! as haughty and imperious, and, as it loves, so can it hate.

Mrs. Beverley. Mean, despicable villain! I scorn thee and thy threats.

Mrs. Beverley was one of Mrs. Siddons's great parts: it was one of the great parts of three generations of actresses.

During the last thirty years of the eighteenth century, an amalgamation took place between comedy, as it had been handed down from the days of Congreve, and prose drama, or, as we should now say, melodrama, as it had been popularised by Lillo and Moore. The first eminent practitioner of the hybrid style was Richard Cumberland, maliciously immortalised by Sheridan in Sir Fretful Plagiary, but, apart from his morbid vanity, a sensible and amiable man. In most of his plays we can trace the two strains quite distinctly. He has scenes in the style of *The Jealous Wife* or *The Clandestine Marriage* alternating with scenes in the style of *George Barnwell* or *The Gamester*. In *The Brothers* (1769), for instance, we have a framework of melodrama. The first scene is described as follows: "A rocky Shore, with a Fisherman's Cabin in the Cliff: a violent Tempest with Thunder and Lightning: a Ship discovered stranded on the coast." Among the passengers rescued from the wreck are Belfield junior and Violetta, a mysterious and beautiful woman whom they have taken off a water-logged

ship at sea. She proves to be the deserted wife of Belfield's elder brother, a villain; and she has now suffered her second shipwreck, on the rocks which border the Cornish estate of her husband, Belfield senior. The long arm of coincidence, you see, has been tolerably active, and we seem to be in for a blood-and-thunder melodrama of the grimmest type; yet the play shades off into a comedy. The character of the henpecked Sir Benjamin Dove is by no means a bad one, and his scenes with Ironside, young Belfield and Lady Dove are quite in the style which was prevalent at the beginning of the century—say, in the works of Mrs. Centlivre. Again, in *The Fashionable Lover* (1772), we have an extremely ill-managed plot of a melodramatic order, in which Lucinda Bridgmore's conduct towards the lovely and amiable Augusta Aubrey is so odious as to recall some of the most terrible scenes in Mr. Masefield's *Tragedy of Nan.* Yet the play is called a comedy, and is, in the main, treated as a comedy. Cumberland does not seem to have been conscious that he was treading in the footsteps of Lillo and Moore rather than in those of Vanbrugh and Farquhar.

As the century drew to a close, melodrama very decisively took the upper hand, and the element of comedy dwindled into mere "comic relief," though that phrase, I think, was not invented until much later. The influence of German romanticism, represented in fiction by Mrs. Radcliffe and "Monk" Lewis, reinforced the tendency towards melodrama. It was, of course, only the worser elements in the romantic movement that proved capable of transplantation. Scott translated Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen,* but it never found its way to the stage; whereas Sheridan's version of Kotzebue's *Pizarro* was one of the most popular plays of the day, its vogue being only exceeded by that of Benjamin Thompson's translation of *Menschenhass und Reue,* entitled *The Stranger.* Elvira in *Pizarro* and Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger* were among Mrs. Siddons's most famous characters; and it will be remembered that it was in the part of Mrs. Haller that, at the Theatre Royal, Chatteris, the Fotheringay captured the susceptible heart of the young Arthur

Pendennis. Native imitations of the Teutonic masterpieces, of course, abounded, the most famous being "Monk" Lewis's *Castle Spectre* and *Bravo of Venice,* and Pocock's *Miller and His Men,* the great classic of our grandsires' toy theatres.

Of the original playwrights of the turn of the century, the most notable and most successful were George Colman, junior, Thomas Holcroft and Thomas Morton. Colman and Holcroft, in their best known works, at any rate, did not fall under the German influence. They wrote bourgeois comedies in which, I fancy, the sociologist will be apt to discern the growing influence of the middle classes. The merchant and tradesman who, from 1660 to 1760, had been admitted to the stage only in the character of dupe, butt, or harmless, necessary purveyor—like the tradesmen who attend Lord Foppington's levee—now begin to elbow the peerage and the squirearchy, if not off the stage, at any rate into the background. Comedy, for a hundred years, had scarcely recognised anyone below the rank of a baronet, a baronet's heir, or the younger son of a peer. It is true that whereas the Sir Frederick Frollick and Sir Fopling Flutter of Etherege were young reprobates, Sheridan's Sir Anthony Absolute and Sir Peter Teazle were staid and sober seniors. The young rake of the Restoration had become, under George III, the elderly squire, leaving the "juvenile lead," so to speak, to the as yet untitled Jack Absolute and Charles Surface. The essential fact is, however, that comedy, down to 1777, took almost all its leading personages from the aristocratic classes. But after *The School for Scandal,* a notable change set in. The baronet, degraded from the position of hero, rapidly degenerated in character, and soon established that prescriptive claim to reckless villainy which he maintains to this day. The hopeless depravity of the baronetage has been for a century an uncontested dogma of stage sociology. You remember how, in Gilbert's *Ruddigore,* the virtuous young farmer, Robin Oakapple, proving to be in reality the elder brother of Sir Despard Murgatroyd, at once becomes the nefarious Sir Ruthven

Murgatroyd, while his faithful servant, old Adam Goodhart, is instantly changed into the bold bad baronet's wicked steward, and renamed Gideon Crawle.* So far, Gilbert is quite true to theatrical tradition; but when he summons up the ghosts of the whole Murgatroyd ancestry and makes out that the line of twenty-one baronets were villains to a man, he is guilty of an anachronism. The association between the baronetage and villainy only came in with the nineteenth century. The baronets of the eighteenth century, if the stage is to be believed, were on the whole quite reputable people. In the seventeenth century, I admit, and even insist, that they were deplorable blackguards; but they thought themselves mighty fine fellows, and were wholly innocent of that deliberate and lurid turpitude which the poet attributes to the race of Murgatroyd. I hold no brief for the baronetage; but my sense of historic justice compels me to declare that it was only when the irrepressible middle-classes hustled him out of the centre of the stage that the British baronet, in revenge, took once for all to villainy.

In the works of the younger Colman, Holcroft and Morton we see the displacement of the peerage and baronetage gradually proceeding. In Colman's *Heir at Law* (1797) the peerage is still virtuous, but is depreciated by the absurdities of a *bourgeois gentilhomme* and his family—a Gosport tallow-chandler, Daniel Dowlas by name,—who, on the ground of a remote relationship, wrongfully succeeds to the title of Lord Duberly, but has to surrender it promptly on the appearance of the rightful heir. He is one of the first of the numerous tribe of uneducated upstarts who so abounded during the nineteenth century. He engages Dr. Pangloss, LL.D. and A.S.S., to correct his slips of language; but, truth to tell, his malapropisms are quite mechanical and unamusing. The best of them occur in the letter in which he announces to his son, Dick, his elevation to the peerage. Dick reads it as follows:

Dick. "Dear Dick, this comes to inform you that I am in a

*This incident seems to have disappeared from *Ruddigore* as now presented. That it occurred on the first night I am absolutely certain.

perfect state of health, hoping you are the same. It was my lot, last week, to be made"—aye, a bankrupt I suppose—"to be made—" what?—"to be made a P, E, A, R,"—a pear?—to be made a pear!—what the devil does he mean by that?

Pangloss. A peer—a peer of the realm.—His lordship's orthography is a little loose, but several of his equals countenance the custom. Lord Loggerhead always spells "physician" with an F.

Dick. A peer!—what, my father!—I'm electrified!—Old Daniel Dowlas made a peer! But let me see. (*Reads on.*) "A peer of the realm—Lawyer Ferret got me my tittle"—titt—Oh, title!—"and an estate of fifteen thousand per ann.—by making me out next of kin to old Lord Duberly because he died without—without hair"!—'Tis an odd reason, by the by, to be next of kin to a nobleman because he died bald.

Pangloss. His lordship means heir—heir to his estate—We shall meliorate his style speedily—"Reform it altogether"—Shakespeare—hem!

This is one of the purple patches of the dialogue, which, as a whole, I must confess, leads one to look back somewhat regretfully to the "wit"of the Restoration. *The Heir at Law* not only illustrates the invasion of the stage by the middle class, but also another tendency of the period—the glorification of the peasant. No self-respecting comedy of the period was complete without its high-spirited bumpkin and virtuous village lass—known in this case as Zekiel Homespun and his sister Cicely.

In Colman's *John Bull* (1803) the degradation of the aristocracy is in full swing. The one peer in the cast is known as Lord Fitz-Balaam, with obvious reference to the animal associated with that name in Scripture; and his daughter is Lady Caroline Braymore. The Hon. Tom Shuffleton, another sprig of nobility, behaves with a baseness but mildly indicated in his name; and Sir Simon Rochdale, Bart., if not exactly a villain, is a sadly unprincipled character. He, like Sir Despard Murgatroyd, proves to have a virtuous elder brother, in the person of Peregrine, the hero of the play; but, unlike Gilbert's hero, Peregrine preserves

his virtue by renouncing his claim to the title. He is suitably rewarded by the recovery of a treasure of one hundred thousand pounds which was thought to have gone down in a wrecked Indiaman. The middle-class is glorified in the person of the upright and downright Job Thornberry, the brazier of Penzance. I am sorry to say that his daughter Mary is not a flawless specimen of bourgeois virtue. Indeed, it is hard to tell what might have become of her had she not encountered Peregrine, newly rescued from one of those providential shipwrecks which abound in the drama of the period. He thus addresses her:

> Listen to me, child. I would proffer you friendship for your own sake—for the sake of benevolence. . . . Time, fair one, is scattering snow on my temples; while Hebe waves her freshest ringlets over yours. Rely, then, on one who has numbered years sufficient to correct his passions; who has encountered difficulties enough to teach him sympathy; and who would stretch forth his hand to a wandering female and shelter her like a father.

It is with Frank Rochdale, eldest son of the unsatisfactory baronet, that Mary has compromised herself. When he has to break to her the news that he cannot marry her, he does so in these terms:

> Oh, Mary, how painful if, performing the duty of a son, I must abandon, at last, the expiation of a penitent! But so dependent on each other are the delicate combinations of probity, that one broken link perplexes the whole chain, and an abstracted virtue becomes a relative iniquity.

This subtle argument strikes Mary speechless, as well it might. Being a simple Cornish lass, she has probably not seen *The School for Scandal*, otherwise she might be tempted to reply, in the words of Sir Peter Teazle to Joseph Surface: "Oh, damn your sentiments!"

One of the most famous plays of the period was Holcroft's *Road to Ruin* (1792), an exclusively middle-class play, unilluminated by any character above the rank of a banker. It is also guiltless of romance—of shipwrecks, or abductions, or long-lost heirs. The plot, indeed, turns upon a missing will. It has been posted from abroad to a gentleman of

strict probity, but unprepossessing manners, who lives up to his name of Mr. Sulky. The postman, by a pardonable error, delivers it to a Mr. Silky, who, being a usurer and a scoundrel, determines to conceal it, and to use his knowledge of its existence for purposes of blackmail. Holcroft, you see, was no pedantic stickler for verisimilitude. The merit of the play, such as it is, lay in the wildly exaggerated characterisation of the benevolent but testy old banker, Dornton, his harum-scarum scapegrace of a son, Harry Dornton, and the horsey rattletrap Goldfinch—one of the numerous ancestors of Dickens's Jingle.* As a specimen of Holcroft's style, I may quote this passage between old Dornton and his confidential clerk, Smith, in which Dornton flies, in every second specch, from the extreme of exasperation against his son's follies to the extreme of tenderness.

Old Dornton. Take warning, I say! Be his distress what it will, not a guinea! Though you should hereafter see him begging, starving in the streets (*With great passion.*) not so much as the loan or the gift of a single guinea.

Mr. Smith. I shall be careful to observe your orders, sir.

Old Dornton. Sir! (*Terror.*) Why, would you see him starve? —Would you see him starve, and not lend him a guinea? Would you, sir? Would you?

Mr. Smith. Sir!—Certainly not, except in obedience to your orders.

Old Dornton. (*Amazement and compassion.*) And could any orders justify your seeing a poor unfortunate youth, rejected by his father, abandoned by his friends, starving to death?

Mr. Smith. There's no danger of that, sir.

Old Dornton. I tell you the thing shall happen! He shall starve to death! . . . (*Almost in tears.*) Yes, yes! He is born to be a poor wretched outcast.

Mr. Smith. I hope, sir, he will still make a fine man.

Old Dornton. Will!—There is not a finer, handsomer, nobler-looking youth in the kingdom; no, not in the world!

The inspiration of this passage is manifest; it is not nature,

*Compare Young Rapid in Morton's *Cure for the Heartache.*

but the desire to give an actor (in this instance, Charles Lamb's favourite Munden) a bravura part, full of rapid and violent transitions of feeling. It is said to have been the character of Goldfinch that made the success of the play. Of the style of this hippomaniac (if I may coin a word) the following specimen may suffice:

> *Goldfinch.* To be sure!—Know the odds!—Hold four in hand —Turn a corner in style!—Reins in form—Elbows square—Wrist pliant—Hayait!—Drive the Coventry stage twice a week all summer:—Pay for an inside place—Mount the box—Tip the coachy a crown—Beat the mail—Come in full speed;—Rattle down the gateway!—Take care of your heads!—Never killed but one woman and a child in all my life—That's your sort!

It is evident from this that the road-hog antedated the motor-car by at least a century.

Thomas Morton was, I think, the least able, and at one time the most popular, of this group. His popularity is vouched for by the fact that he has added an immortal figure to the mythology of our race. The invisible Mrs. Grundy will certainly live as long as her equally intangible sister, Mrs. Harris; she is known to millions of people who never heard of Morton, or of the play in which she figures —one cannot say appears. In Morton's work, even more clearly than in Colman's or Holcroft's, we are conscious of the irruption of the bourgeois and the bumpkin; and he inclines more obviously than the others to an alternation of melodrama and "comic relief." It may amuse you to hear the first introduction of Mrs. Grundy to the notice of mankind. The date was February 8, 1800, and the play was *Speed the Plough*. She swims into our ken in the very first scene, which is thus described:

> *In the foreground a Farm House—A view of a Castle at a distance. Farmer Ashfield discovered at a Table, with his Jug and a Pipe. Enter Dame Ashfield in a Riding Dress, and a Basket under her Arm.*

Ashfield. Well, Dame, welcome whoam. What news does thee bring vrom market?

Dame. What news, husband? What I always told you, that Farmer Grundy's wheat brought five shillings a quarter more than ours did. . . . And I assure you, Dame Grundy's butter was quite the crack of the market.

Ashfield. Be quiet, wool ye? always ding, dinging Dame Grundy into my ears—what will Mrs. Grundy zay? What will Mrs. Grundy think?—Can't thee be quiet, let ur alone, and behave thyzel pretty. . . .

Dame. . . . A handsome young man, dressed all in lace, pulled off his hat to me and said—"Mrs. Ashfield, do me the honour of presenting that letter to your husband"—So there he stood without his hat—Oh, Tummas, had you seen how Mrs. Grundy looked!

Ashfield. Dom Mrs. Grundy—be quiet, and let I read, wool ye?

The baronet in *Speed the Plough,* Sir Philip Blandford by name, is not exactly wicked, though he believes himself a murderer. He is a fury-haunted personage of the type of Manfred or the melancholy Earl in Scott's *Antiquary*—one of the thousand characters of the period who have "Made in Germany" legibly stamped upon them. Here is part of the scene in which Sir Philip tells his sad story to a very odd confidant, by name Handy junior:

Sir Philip. Now listen to my story.

Handy Jun. You rivet my attention.

Sir Philip. While we were boys, my father died intestate; so I, as elder born, became the sole possessor of his fortune; but the moment the law gave me power, I divided, in equal portions, his large possessions, one of which I with joy presented to my brother.

Handy Jun. It was noble.

Sir Philip. (*With suppressed agony.*) You shall hear, sir, how I was rewarded. Chance placed in my view a young woman of superior personal charms; my heart was captivated. Fortune she possessed not—but mine was ample. She blessed me by consenting to our union, and my brother approved my choice.

Handy Jun. How enviable your situation!

Sir Philip. Oh! (*Sighing deeply.*) On the evening previous

to my intended marriage, with a mind serene as the departing sun, whose morning beam was to light me to happiness, I sauntered to a favorite tree, where, lover-like, I had marked the name of my destined bride, and, with every nerve braced to the tone of ecstasy, I was wounding the bark with a deeper impression of the name—when, oh God!—

Handy Jun. Pray proceed.

Sir Philip. When the loved offspring of my mother and the woman my soul adored . . . placed themselves before me; I heard him—even now the sound is in my ears and drives me to madness—I heard him breathe vows of love which she answered with burning kisses. . . . Picture the young tiger when first his savage nature rouses him to vengeance—the knife was in my gripe—I sprung upon them—with one hand I tore the faithless woman from his damned embrace, and with the other—stabbed my brother to the heart. . . . That chamber contains evidence of my shame: the fatal instrument, with other guilty proofs, lies there concealed—can you wonder I dread to visit the scene of horror—can you wonder I implore you in mercy to save me from the task? Oh, my friend, enter the chamber, bury in endless night those instruments of blood, and I will kneel and worship you.

The "guilty proofs" have lain there undisturbed for a quarter of a century, and might, one would think, have been left in peace. As a matter of fact, Handy junior, for no very clear reason, does not disturb their repose. They remain unburied in endless night until the castle happens to take fire. This is the chance for Henry, the offspring of the traitorous brother and faithless lady, who has been brought up in bucolic innocence by Farmer Ashfield and his wife—consequently, it will be observed, under the immediate supervision of Mrs. Grundy. He precipitates himself into the flames, and rescues his cousin, Miss Blandford, with whom he is of course in love; and then again he rushes into the furnace, to emerge once more scatheless but horror-stricken. Then this dialogue ensues:

Miss Blandford. (*Shrieks.*) Thank Heaven, he's safe! What urged you, Henry, again to venture in the castle?

Henry. Fate! the desperate attempt of a desperate man.

Sir Philip. Ah!

Henry. Yes: the mystery is developed. In vain the massy bars, cemented with their cankerous rust, opposed my entrance—in vain the heated suffocating damps enveloped me—in vain the hungry flames flashed their vengeance round me! What could oppose a man struggling to know his fate? I forced the doors, a firebrand was my guide, and among many evidences of blood and guilt, I found —these!

(*Produces a knife and bloody cloth.*)

It would be curious to know what were the other "evidences of blood and guilt"; for, as a matter of fact, the traitorous brother was not killed, but has through all these years been watching over Sir Philip's career, like a sort of pseudonymous Providence. The disappearance of the body never seems to have struck Sir Philip. Yet it is notorious that one of the inconveniences of murder lies in the fact that the corpse seldom or never walks away under its own steam, so to speak.

In another of Morton's successful plays, *The School of Reform* (1805), we have a wicked peer contrasted with a specimen of ineffable virtue in the lower orders. In a third, *A Cure for the Heartache* (1797), the villain is not a nobleman but a nabob, Vortex by name, while the baronet, Sir Hubert Stanley, is benevolence incarnate. This play, too, has added a phrase to the language—"Praise from Sir Hubert Stanley." The correct quotation is "Approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley is praise indeed."

Poor as these plays were, there was a certain amount of life in them. Some of them held the stage for well over half a century. I have myself seen Colman's *Heir-at-Law* and *Poor Gentleman;* also Holcroft's *Road to Ruin,* which

was frequently acted at the Vaudeville and the Strand Theatres in the seventies and eighties. A play with such vitality cannot be absolutely devoid of merit. It is to be noted that these men, like their predecessors for several generations, did not go direct to life for their material but saw character in terms of actors. They catered for a group of brilliant comedians: the group which Charles Lamb has so enthusiastically celebrated—Munden, Suett, Emery, Dodd, Fawcett, Lewis and others. We should note, moreover, that it was their business to supply parts in each play for a large number of actors of pretty nearly even merit and importance. The star system and the actor-manager system had not yet come in, to concentrate interest upon one central figure, or at most two. Now the star and the actor-manager are, in the main, evils; but most evils have their compensation; and it is not to be denied that a play which is dominated by one central figure is apt to be of stronger architecture than one in which the interest is dispersed over half a dozen personages of equal importance. One reason for Shakespeare's vitality is that, even in his comedies, he almost always provided what we should nowadays call a star part.

So much by way of accounting for the weaknesses of the school of dramatic writing which prevailed about the turn of the century. But the ultimate reason is, of course, the personal one—these playwrights were men of small talent and no originality. Nevertheless they towered above their contemporaries—above such men as "Reynolds, Dibdin and Cherry," a trio whose names have come down to us mainly through the contempt of Leigh Hunt. And when plays of the calibre of *John Bull* and *Speed the Plough* ceased to he produced, there ensued the very barrenest period in the history of the English drama. It lasted, roughly speaking, for a quarter of a century—from about 1810 to about 1835. It saw the dying out of a great generation of actors, and the disintegration of the theatrical system under which they had flourished. In comedy nothing of any note was produced, and tragedy was represented by dismal and stodgy productions, inspired by the worst traditions of the seven-

teenth and eighteenth centuries. How deep was the decline appears clearly from the fact that Sheridan Knowles, whose first play, *Virginius*, was produced in 1820, was incontestably the leading playwright of the period.

Knowles was doubtless an early product of the pseudo-Elizabethanism fostered by Lamb's *Specimens*. But he was not misled into taking Webster and Ford for his models. His Elizabethan inspiration he drew, in the main, from Massinger; but his verbosity and his commonness derived rather from the Restoration. I am old enough to remember the time when he was taken seriously as a dramatist. I have seen several of his plays presented, not as curiosities, but as living masterpieces, making a direct appeal to the sympathies and the pockets of playgoers. I know of few men who have made any considerable success on the stage with less genuine talent to account for it. His art lay wholly in stodgy rhetoric, less bombastic, indeed, than that of Lee and Otway, but all the more flat and tedious. He was especially intolerable when he strayed into comedy: yet *The Hunchback*, produced in 1832, with Fanny Kemble and her father in the leading parts, was perhaps his greatest success. I suppose elocution-classes still exist in which the scene between Helen and Modus is regarded as a show piece—a comic counterpart to the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius. How many thousands of people, I wonder, finding that this sort of stuff met with acceptance in the theatre, have been deluded into the idea that they, too, could make their fortunes as dramatists? It is a terrible thought that the hundreds of still-born blank-verse plays which cumber the shelves of the British Museum are probably but as foam upon the ocean of similar effusions which never even found their way into print.

Several abler men than Knowles were writing plays of a similar type in the tens and twenties of the century—Milman, Shiel, Procter (Barry Cornwall), Gerald Griffin, and (a little later) Talfourd. From the fact that none of these men could rival Knowles either in immediate success or in permanence of popularity, it is only fair to assume that

Knowles possessed some trick of the scene, or perhaps some energy of rhetoric, denied to them. But I have never been able to divine the secret of his acceptance. He had not even the flashy theatricalism of Bulwer Lytton.

The period was more or less conscious of its own degradation. *Blackwood's Magazine* for June 1825 contained an article by the Shakespearean scholar, Harness, devoted mainly to an attack (on the whole unjust) upon "your *soi-disant great actors*"—Kean, Young and Macready—but also proclaiming the degradation of authorship. "Who are your successful authors?" the clerical critic wrote: "Planché and Arnold, Poole and Kenney; names so ignoble in the world of literature that they have no circulation beyond the green-room." Not the least vital productions of the period were hasty dramatisations of the Waverley Novels, with all the melodramatic elements thrown into relief.

Meanwhile the system of dramatic monopoly, which confined the so-called "legitimate" drama to the two patent theatres, had been rapidly breaking down. It was not formally abolished until 1843; but ever since 1806, so-called "minor theatres" had been springing up on every hand. The literature which flourished in these theatres consisted mainly of romantic and nautical dramas, interspersed with songs—whence the name "melodrama." It was of the most pitiful quality, but at least it was not stodgy and pretentious. Those were the days when hack dramatists produced plays by the hundred and sold them outright to the managers at prices ranging from three to twenty or even thirty pounds. Probably the most notable of these transpontine masterpieces was Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan,* produced at the Surrey Theatre in 1829.

We are pretty safe, then, in setting down the twenty-five years between 1810 and 1835 as the winter solstice of English drama. There had been no such lean years since 1590, if we except the short period during which Civil War and Puritanism silenced the stage. With the beginning of the Victorian era there came a slight revival; but it was barely perceptible, and was not in any way a result of the

accession of the young Queen. It was by pure chance that Macready's two periods of management (Covent Garden 1837-39 and Drury Lane 1841-43) happened to fall within the first six years of the new reign; and Macready's management contributed little or nothing to living drama, save the plays of Sir Edward Lytton-Bulwer. That contribution, however, was of a certain significance.

The first Lord Lytton was a man whose glaring faults overlaid and did injustice to very real talents—even for drama. There is a vast difference beween him and such a writer as Sheridan Knowles. His plays were very much alive on the provincial and even on the London stage when I first began to study the theatre, and I have written many contemptuous things about them in my day, which I cannot in conscience retract. Yet in saying so I feel ungrateful, for all their faults cannot, and ought not to, annul the fact that *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu* and even *Money* have given me a great deal of pleasure. The pleasure was always mixed with amusement; but at any rate it was quite distinct from the sheer boredom begotten by almost all the blank-verse plays between Otway and Knowles, inclusive. Claude Melnotte and Pauline might be ridiculous, but there was a real dramatic interest in their situation, and no small ingenuity in the working out of it. Perhaps I ought to remind you, briefly, of the plot.

Claude Melnotte is a gardener's son in the neighbourhood of Lyons,—a youth of immense genius, who writes, paints and fences apparently by the light of nature, without any teaching. He ventures to raise his eyes to the beautiful daughter of M. Deschappelles, a wealthy citizen of Lyons, whose snobbish wife has infected the fair Pauline with some of her own false pride. His widowed mother warns Claude of the hopelessness of his passion.

Widow. My poor son!—the young lady will never think of thee.

Melnotte. Do the stars think of us? Yet if the prisoner see them shine into his dungeon, wouldst thou bid him turn away from *their* lustre? Even so, from this

> low cell, poverty, I lift my eyes to Pauline and forget my chains.

He has ventured to send her a signed copy of verses: imagine his indignation when his messenger, Gaspar, brings him back his manuscript, returned, not with thanks, but with blows, administered, I should add, not by Pauline, but by her lackeys.

> *Melnotte.* With blows? No, Gaspar, no; not blows!
> *Gaspar.* I could show thee the marks if it were not so deep a shame to bear them. . . . What could thy letter contain, Claude?
> *Melnotte.* Not a line that a serf might not have written to an empress. No, not one. . . .
> *Gaspar.* Thou art moved, Melnotte; think not of me; I would go through fire and water to serve thee; but—a blow! It is not the *bruise* that galls, but the *blush.*

While Melnotte is smarting under this insult, two wealthy villains, Beauséant and Glavis, whose addresses Pauline has rejected, determine to make him the tool of a base revenge upon her. They will supply him with fine clothes and money, and introduce him to the Deschappelles family as an Italian nobleman, the Prince of Como, under which disguise he is to woo and wed Pauline. Melnotte, in his exasperation, lends himself to the scheme, and carries it out with complete success. The most famous passage in the play is the speech in which the sham Prince of Como pictures to Pauline the delights which await them in the

> Palace lifting to eternal summer
> Its marble walls

to which he is about to lead her.

After the marriage ceremony Claude takes Pauline to his mother's humble cot, and there she learns the trick that has been played upon her. A scene of fury and despair ensues; and after it Claude hands her over to his mother's chaperonage, promising to send for her parents the next day, and give her every facility for procuring a divorce. He joins the army of Italy under General Bonaparte, and of course

returns after two or three years, a colonel and a hero. He arrives in Lyons just as Pauline is about to give her hand to the villain, Beauséant, in order to save her father from ruin. Holding his military cloak before his face, he assists unrecognised at the scene of sacrifice, until the Notary is on the point of handing the contract to Pauline for her signature, whereupon he siezes the document and tears it:

Beauséant. Are you mad?
Deschappelles. How, sir! What means this insult?
Melnotte. Peace, old man!
I have a prior claim. Before the face
Of man and Heaven I urge it; I outbid
Yon sordid huckster for your priceless jewel.
(*Giving a pocket-book.*)
There is the sum twice told! Blush not to take it:
There's not a coin that is not bought and hallowed
In the cause of nations with a soldier's blood.
Beauséant. Torments and death!
Pauline. That voice! Thou art—
Melnotte. Thy husband!

This rant is only too characteristic of Bulwer's style; he could not break loose from the turgid tradition of two centuries. But there is something new and lively in the story he tells, and even in his handling of it. There is a touch of invention in it which the stage had scarcely known in the sixty years which had passed since *The School for Scandal.*

Richelieu was even more stagey and even more adroit. I shall never forget the effect produced by that great actor, Edwin Booth, in the scene where the villain, Baradas, an emissary of the King, Louis XIII, tries, with the most sinister motives, to snatch from Richelieu's protection his ward Julie de Mortemar:

Richelieu. She shall not stir!
Baradas. You are not of her kindred—
An orphan—
Richelieu. And her country is her mother!
Baradas. The country is the King!

Richelieu. Ay, is it so?—
Then wakes the power which in the age of iron
Burst forth to curb the great and raise the low.
Mark, where she stands!—around her form I draw
The awful circle of our solemn church!
Set but a foot within that holy ground,
And on thy head—yea though it wore a crown—
I launch the curse of ROME!

Edwin Booth's rendering of this passage was one of a few performances I can recall which enabled me to realise the *kind* of effect which the great actors and actresses of the great age of rhetorical acting used to produce. It was thrilling, startling, electrifying, beyond anything dreamt of on our humdrum realistic stage. It was not imitation—it was passion incarnate.

What was it, now, that differentiated the work of Bulwer from that of the Knowleses, Shiels and Talfourds who surrounded him? Why do we feel that while they belong in spirit to the eighteenth century, Bulwer carries us deep into the nineteenth? How are we to account for the note of modernity which we detect amid all his bombast and fustian?

For the answer to this question, we must, I think, look to France. A great dramatic movement, or rather two great dramatic movements, had been going on in France since 1815. One of them is world-famous—the romantic uprising associated with the names of Dumas père and Victor Hugo —with *Henri III et sa Cour* and *Hernani*. But perhaps more abidingly influential was the humble bourgeois movement headed by Eugène Scribe and his innumerable collaborators. Dumas père, indeed, may be said to have belonged to both movements: he was one of the great dramaturges of the world. In France, at all events, had been discovered the central secret of modern technique—the infinite ductility or malleability of dramatic material. In other words, systematic ingenuity had, almost for the first time, been applied to the ordering of plot. The art of keeping action always moving, and freeing it from the frippery of irrelevant wit and the adipose tissue of wordy rhetoric had been invented and developed. This is a very summary and inaccurate descrip-

tion of the phenomenon in question. The history of French technique, from Beaumarchais to Sardou, has yet to be written. It is sufficient for my present purpose to point out that a practically new art had been evolved—an art of deft and delicate manipulation which was an indispensable step towards the purification of drama from the rhetorical and exaggerative elements that had hitherto clung to it. And Bulwer was the first Englishman to fall markedly under the French influence. Not for nothing did he lay the scene of three out of his five plays in France: he could not better have proclaimed his adherence to the romantic school. He was far enough, indeed, from casting out rhetoric: rather, he revelled in it with peculiar gusto. He was no theoretic innovator. Even the leaders of the movement in France did not know what they were really doing—as is frequently the case with innovators. The consequences of the new methods of Dumas and Scribe were not to be fully developed for another half-century and more—not, indeed, until the new methods had been learnt and unlearnt by Ibsen. None the less was fresh sap stirring in the veins of European drama; and Bulwer was the first Englishman to feel the thrill. That credit cannot be denied him. His feet were on the right road; while Browning, whose *Strafford* and *Blot in the 'Scutcheon* were produced in the same years, was displaying his lack of dramatic instinct by using the old methods in a wholly ineffective fashion. Bulwer was a man-of-the-theatre, Browning was not; and we shall see, as we trace the revival which was now at hand, that the theatre cannot be saved, or even helped, by outside genius, but only by born men-of-the-theatre.

X

Hitherto we have been watching the gradual decline of English drama into something very like inanition and imbecility. Today it is our pleasanter task to mark the turn of the tide; but before we arrive at that happy moment, there is a period of slack water to be recorded.

Throughout the eighteenth century, and even down to the days of Knowles and Bulwer Lytton, the drama was still recognised as a branch of literature. Plays were not only printed but bought and read. For Goldsmith's comparatively unsuccessful comedy, *The Good-Natured Man*, Griffin, the publisher, gave him fifty pounds, and, in announcing a new edition, stated that the whole of the first "large impression" had been sold on the second day.* Sheridan was offered five hundred pounds for the copyright of *The School for Scandal*. The fact that the habit of play-reading lasted well into the nineteenth century is attested by the long rows of Bell's *British Theatre*, Inchbald's *Modern Theatre*, and other collections, which cumber the shelves of the old bookshops.

But the time came, in the middle years of last century, when no publisher would offer five hundred, fifty or even five pounds for a play. Five-act tragedies, indeed, continued to appear, but generally, it is to be feared, at their author's own expense. Comedies and melodramas, if printed at all, appeared only in the form of miserable sixpenny pamphlets for the use of amateur clubs. The divorce between the stage and literature was so complete that people entirely lost the habit of reading plays, and have as yet but imperfectly recovered it.

Bulwer Lytton's three plays were produced between 1837 and 1840, T. W. Robertson's *Society* in 1865. The interim of twenty-five years saw the abolition (in 1843) of theat-

*Forster's *Goldsmith*, Bk. IV, Chap. 1.

rical monopoly, the introduction of free trade in the drama, and the gradual displacement of the old repertory system by the system of long runs. It is foolish and futile to denounce the long run as an unmixed evil. It is absolutely inevitable in the enormous cities begotten by modern industrialism and rapid transit. Moreover, it has some great artistic advantages, as we shall presently see. The mistake we have made in England is not that we have admitted long runs, but that we have failed to take the necessary measures to keep a certain number of repertory theatres going alongside of the long-run theatres. There are several very valuable classes of drama that cannot flourish except at repertory theatres; and they are absolutely indispensable as schools of acting. Only by frequent change from one character to another can a young actor or actress acquire the impersonative suppleness requisite to full accomplishment.

The period of transition between the two systems was necessarily one of confusion. Conservatism mourned unduly over the passing away of ideals and traditions which were as obsolete as periwigs and patches; while innovation had no clear idea of what it would be at. Moreover the romantic drama and bourgeois comedy of France, which contained (as I suggested in my last lecture) the seeds of the technique which was to dominate the future, for the time being set up an unfair and demoralising competition with native production. The fault did not lie with the French: they were wholly unwilling competitors. Their goods were impudently stolen and dumped upon the British market. No copyright or stageright placed any barrier in the way of the most barefaced annexation of plots and ideas—nay, of whole plays—often without a word of acknowledgment. The very fact that ingenuity and adroitness rather than insight and thought were the qualities of the school of Scribe, rendered the luxuriant French drama of the period readily capable of exportation. It was not so intimately true to French life as to be inadmissibly untrue to English life. Adaptation became the very simplest of crafts, and, for something like half a century, anyone who could buy, borrow or steal a

French dictionary could set up in business as a playwright The poorest French comedies, vaudevilles and melodramas were at all events a trifle more interesting than the lucubrations of Messrs. Reynolds, Dibdin and Cherry, Dimond, Pocock and Terry. Even the original plays of the period were formed on French models, reproducing all that was most artificial and most obvious in the methods of Scribe and his school. Thus the twenty-five years from 1840 to 1865 were almost as barren as the similar period between 1810 and 1835. The five years between the two periods had been redeemed from utter insignificance by the plays of Bulwer.

Of the mid-century playwrights only Douglas Jerrold, Charles Reade, Tom Taylor, Westland Marston and Dion Boucicault are remembered even by name; and two of the five—Douglas Jerrold and Charles Reade—are remembered for other reasons than their association with the theatre. Douglas Jerrold wrote pleasant, trivial comedies and domestic dramas. He may be classified as a disciple of the school of Holcroft and Morton, who has also taken a course of lessons from Scribe. That he was not over-scrupulous in his expedients may be judged from the conclusion of his comedy, *The Rent Day*. A virtuous farmer and his wife are about to be ruined and forced to emigrate by the wicked steward of the estate. An execution being put into the farmhouse, Martin (the farmer) insists on rescuing his grandfather's arm-chair from the broker's men. A scuffle ensues, in the course of which (says the stage-direction) "the back of the chair is pulled off, when out fall loose gold, small money-bags, and paper" — three hundred guineas in all. Of course the rent is triumphantly paid and the wicked steward baffled. The technical merits of this device are all the more questionable as the virtuous husbandman is quite safe without it, seeing that his philanthropic landlord is wandering around in disguise, and the days of the steward's supremacy are in any case numbered.

Charles Reade, a man of some genius, was convinced that he was a born dramatist, but contributed nothing of permanent interest to the stage. His most famous play, *Masks and*

Faces, written in collaboration with Tom Taylor, was very attractive in its day, but is now seen to be hopelessly tricky and artificial.

Tom Taylor was an industrious playwright without a spark of inspiration. He produced historic dramas in wooden blank-verse, and comedies and dramas of intrigue on the French model. A good deal of his work falls on the hither side of the period we are for the moment considering; but a very characteristic and successful play, *Plot and Passion,* was produced so early as 1853, and is worth a moment's inspection.

If one read it in ignorance of the author's name, one would unhesitatingly set it down as a bad play of Scribe's —a sort of caricature of his style. The date is 1810, and Fouché, Napoleon's famous Minister of Police, is the chief character. He goes about disguised as a priest, the father-confessor of Madame de Fontanges, one of his spies, in whose house most of the action passes. Within two minutes of the rise of the curtain he enters in this character, dismisses Madame de Fontanges's servants, and proceeds to bolt all the doors of the room and close the curtains. Then he is good enough to soliloquize as follows:

> Never trust an order while there's a bolt. Now for my ferret—to all but me, M. Le Bon, the respectable proprietor of the house next door—to me, Maximilian Desmarets, the most unmitigated rascal and most invaluable head of a secret department in Europe. It was a good idea of mine to establish him next door to Madame de Fontanges. We meet here unobserved. (*He touches a spring in the frame of the picture, R. It moves and discovers a secret door.*) Hist! Desmarets!

The audience of 1853 doubtless felt very much obliged to Fouché for informing himself of the character of his subordinate and of the fact that this was their secret meeting-place. I fear a twentieth-century audience would ungratefully laugh at these well-meant confidences.

With the entrance of Desmarets we are plunged into an inextricable web of intrigue. Napoleon is negotiating a marriage with Marie Louise of Austria; Fouché, on his

behalf, but behind his back, is negotiating a marriage with a Russian princess; and both negotiations are carried on by Fouché through the instrumentality of secret agents who convey letters in walking-sticks and bon-bon boxes. Moreover Fouché is anxious to discover and make away with the author of a certain lampoon upon him which has appeared in London, signed "Timon"; and Desmarets is equally anxious that he should *not* discover "Timon," seeing that he, Desmarets, has supplied him with the incriminating documents. A scrap of paper with "Timon's" handwriting reveals to Fouché his identity, in the person of a certain Henri de Neuville. Now, there are two carriages standing in the courtyard, one to transport a secret agent to Prague, the other to convey the inconvenient pamphleteer to Vincennes and death. Fouché orders de Neuville to take the right-hand carriage (*ligne de Vincennes*), but Desmarets arranges that he shall take the left-hand carriage (*ligne de Prague*). Whether the secret agent, who should have gone to Prague, is conveyed to Vincennes and executed, I really forget, and it really doesn't matter. The whole thing is a preposterous piece of mechanism which will not bear a moment's serious examination. As the action goes on, the expedients become clumsier and clumsier, and the soliloquies explaining them become more and more ridiculous. In the end, the sympathetic characters are rescued from the snares of Fouché, because one of them manages to convey to Napoleon a document proving that Fouché is betraying him, which has been abstracted from its hiding-place in a walking-stick. *Plot and Passion* is a conspicuous example of the truth that there is nothing more intolerable than an ill-made, well-made play.

The fourth playwright of this mid-century period is Dr. Westland Marston, an eminently respectable writer of eminently uninteresting plays, mostly in blank-verse. Two of his plays, *The Patrician's Daughter* and *Anne Blake*, produced by Macready and Charles Kean respectively, were considered daringly original because they employed blank-verse in the treatment of contemporary themes. That the

attempt was not entirely fortunate may be judged from the lines in which the Earl of Lynterne requests the family solicitor to read his daughter's marriage-settlement:

Earl. Good friends, assembled here to confer honour
Upon the near espousals, I beseech
Your kind attention while this gentleman
Reads in your hearing the accustomed deed
Determining the rights and property
Of such as stand affianced.

I fear these are the only lines of the worthy Westland Marston that stand much chance of going down to posterity.

The fifth name on our list—Dion Boucicault—was that of an adroit man-of-the-theatre: actor, manager and author. He came to the front so early as 1841, with a play, *London Assurance,* which was probably the shallowest and flashiest production that ever passed for a serious comedy. Yet for nearly half a century it ranked as a sort of classic of the stage. Boucicault afterwards became an industrious adaptor from the French, and he applied the methods of French melodrama in lively and picturesque pieces of his own, such as *Arrah-na-Pogue* and the famous *Colleen Bawn.* His latest success, *The Shaughraun,* falls well within the period we have next to consider.

That period was to witness the turn of the tide—the first upward movement that did not prove entirely evanescent and deceptive. Thomas William Robertson, born in 1829, was the eldest child of a large family, of which Madge Robertson (Mrs. Kendal) was the youngest. His father was a provincial actor and manager, his mother an actress. He was nurtured on the stage, and became in due time an inconspicuous actor, stage-manager, prompter and hack adaptor of plays. Of education he had little or none, except such as the stage afforded. But he had ambitions towards original authorship, and from the age of twenty onwards he produced various dramas and farces, all more or less trivial and more or less unsuccessful. He had, however, a keen eye for the defects in the dominant system of production and acting, and an alert sense for the social discrepancies, injustices

and snobberies incident to the displacement of feudalism by industrialism, which he studied, not so much in real life as in the works of the Victorian novelists and poets—Dickens, Thackeray and Tennyson. At last, in 1865, his chance came. A very bright burlesque actress, Miss Marie Wilton, —another scion of an old theatrical stock—in partnership with Robertson's friend H. J. Byron, had taken a little theatre in Tottenham Street, popularly known as the Dusthole, renovated and upholstered it, and opened it as a home of comedy and burlesque, under the name of the Prince of Wales's. To this new management Robertson offered a comedy, *Society*, which had been scornfully rejected by Buckstone at the Haymarket. It was accepted and produced on November 11, 1865—a date which certainly marks an epoch in the history of English drama.

Not that the play was a work of genius—very far from it. The fact that it was instantly recognised as betokening a new departure affords a measure of the depth to which the drama had declined. Its merits were mainly negative —it was not a heavy imitation of eighteenth-century comedy, nor was it a piece of spurious Scribe. The simplicity which was its chief virtue might more accurately have been called triviality. Sidney Daryl, the younger son of a baronet, has nobly impoverished himself for the sake of his elder brother. He loves Maud Hetherington, the ward of the scheming Lady Ptarmigant, who wants her to marry John Chodd junior, an upstart and underbred millionaire. A perfectly foolish misunderstanding estranges Maud from Sidney, and she accepts the objectionable Chodd. But when Chodd has the audacity to stand for the seat in Parliament which has been held for generations by Daryls, Sidney swoops down upon it, drives the interloper from the field in the twinkling of an eye, rehabilitates himself in the eyes of Maud—and all is over. The play is an astonishing mixture of old form and new feeling. I say "feeling" rather than "observation," for of first-hand or penetrating observation there is little enough. Most of the characters come straight from Thackeray. Sidney Daryl and his friend the journalist, Tom Stylus, are

weak reproductions of Arthur Pendennis and George Warrington. Maud Hetherington is Ethel Newcome, and Lady Ptarmigant a vulgarised Lady Kew. One of the great successes of the play was a love-scene in the garden of a London Square, with a practicable gate and railings. This was recognised as a welcome touch of atmosphere.

Anothed very attractive scene was that which introduced us to the "Owl's Roost," a Bohemian pot-house club. It was novel, it was humorous, it was effective; but it was a success of staging and acting rather than of writing. It was clever rough-and-ready sketching; there was no depth in the portrayal; as one reads it one is surprised to remember how amusing it seemed. But here again we had atmosphere—a rather dense atmosphere of tobacco and gin-and-water. It is interesting, by the way, to recall that the heroic Sidney Daryl, quite a Bayard in the author's intention, conceiving a foolish suspicion of his lady-love's fidelity, proceeds to seek consolation in champagne and openly insults her before a ball-room full of people. Are we to conclude that manners have greatly improved since 1865, or merely that the author did not know what was possible in a mid-Victorian drawing-room?

Be this as it may, the comedy was hailed from the first as something fresh and charming. The late Clement Scott, who was present on the first night—I myself saw it only in a revival, ten years later—wrote as follows:

> Suddenly, as the play advanced, there appeared on the stage what was then an apparition. Bancroft had delighted us with his cheery enthusiasm and boyish manner, for he was the lover in this simple little play—well-dressed, and, for a wonder, natural. Think what it was to see a bright, cheery, pleasant young fellow playing the lover to a pretty girl, at the time when stage lovers were nearly all sixty, and dressed like waiters at a penny-ice shop. . . . But what astonished us even more than the success of Young Bancroft was the apparition that I spoke of just now. A little delightful old gentleman came upon the stage, dressed in a long, beautifully-cut frock-coat, bright-eyed, intelligent, with white hair that seemed to grow naturally on the head—no common, clumsy wig with a black forehead-line—and with a voice so refined, so aristocratic,

that it was music to our ears. . . . We could not analyse our youthful impressions at the time, but we knew instinctively that John Hare was an artist.

This artist who played the senile Lord Ptarmigant was at that time a boy of twenty-one. It is sometimes said that Lord Ptarmigant had nothing to do but to fall asleep on two chairs so that people might tumble over his legs. But this is scarcely fair to Robertson. It is true that people do tumble over his legs with exasperating frequency; but at the right moment the sleeper awakens, and firmly asserts himself in opposition to his designing wife; and that was the legitimate effect at which the playwright aimed.

Robertson's full originality, however, was not revealed until *Ours* was produced at the same theatre, nearly a year later (September 15, 1866). In reading the play today, we recognise in Robertson—just what the stage wanted in its progress towards verisimilitude—the genius of the commonplace. The first act was, in intention at any rate, steeped in an atmosphere quite new to the theatre. The scene was an avenue in Shendryn Park, which Robertson describes in the abhorrent prompt-book jargon of his time. But one line had, I venture to say, as yet appeared in no prompt-book in the world: "*Throughout the act the autumn leaves fall from the trees.*" How this effect was produced and whether it was successful, I cannot say. Nor can I here discuss the question whether it was a desirable effect, or a mere trick of mechanical realism which the true artist would despise. The point is that it shows a wholly new desire to produce an illusion of reality by minute but characteristic touches. Robertson was a pre-Raphaelite of the theatre. Then, as the act proceeds, "The patter of rain is heard upon the leaves," and again, "The rain comes down more heavily and the stage darkens"—an effect which would have been absolutely impossible in a candle-lit scene. Then enter the sentimental hero and heroine, Angus Macalister and Blanche Haye, caught in the rain; and—conceive the daring novelty!—"Blanche carries the skirt of her dress over her head." In the centre of the stage is a large tree, with a bench round

it. To get better shelter they stand upon the bench; and presently Angus takes off his coat and ties it by its sleeves round Blanche's neck. Meanwhile Sir Alexander and Lady Shendryn, a middle-aged pair, have taken refuge in another shelter and are sitting on the stump of a tree. Unconscious of each other's presence, the two couples talk in a sort of ironic counterpoint, the billing and cooing of the as yet undeclared lovers contrasting with the acid bickering of the disillusioned elders. The scene is written with no distinction —even, in the Shendryn wrangle, with a touch of vulgarity —but the originality of the whole conception is unmistakable. All rhetorical over-emphasis, whether comic or tragic, is gone; what the author aims at is exact imitation at any rate of the surfaces of life. The element of lyricism is not entirely absent from the love-scene, but it is brought in thus simply:

Angus. What was that song you sang at the Sylvesters'?
Blanche. Oh!
Angus. I wish you'd hum it now.
Blanche. Without music?
Angus. It won't be without music.

—and Blanche croons over Offenbach's exquisite *Chanson de Fortunio*. Of wit, in the whole scene, there is scarcely a trace; but there are one or two charming touches of nature, such as Blanche's confession to Angus: "Cousin, do you know, I rather like to see you getting wet." You may search the Restoration and eighteenth-century comedy in vain for a piece of subtle truth like this; and one reason is that the stage lacked the means of presenting the physical conditions that rendered it possible.

Another incident in this act shows the genuine and original dramatist. Sergeant Jones of "Ours" has had an addition to his already large family in the shape of twins. Mary Netley, the comic heroine—a comic as well as a sentimental heroine belonged to the Robertsonian formula—Mary Netley gets up a subscription for Mrs. Jones, and Hugh Chalcot, the millionaire brewer, refuses to contribute to it. But Chalcot, as a Thackerayan cynic, conceals a heart of gold under his

brusque exterior. He happens to have received a fifty-pound note in payment of a debt; and he longs to hand this on to Sergeant Jones, but is afraid that Jones will talk about it, and that "the singular munificence of Hugh Chalcot, Esqr., the eminent brewer," will get into the papers. After long hesitation, he determines to risk it, gives the Sergeant the note, and hurries off. The Sergeant looks at it and calls him back: "Hi, sir—sir! (*Chalcot re-enters.*) I beg your pardon, sir, for calling you back; but you've made a mistake; you meant to give me a five-pun note—an' many thanks, sir; but this here's for fifty." Chalcot examines it through his eye-glass, hesitates for a moment, then gives the Sergeant a five-pound note in exchange, and walks off, saying with suppressed rage: "Thank you—yes—my mistake." Who can wonder that the public recognised something new and original in the work of this dramatist?

The second act of *Ours* passed in a modern drawing-room, and showed Lady Shendryn, Blanche Haye and Mary Netley watching the troops march along Birdcage Walk on their way to the Crimea. This effect, since so familiar, was then novel and intensely moving. The wildly improbable but amusing last act passed in a hut in the Crimea, where Mary Netley captivated the heart of Hugh Chalcot while compounding, with improvised materials, a roly-poly pudding. Not the least attraction of the act lay in the howling wind and driving snow which were heard and seen every time the door of the hut was opened—then a piece of startling realism.

Robertson's great triumph, however, came in the following spring with the production of *Caste* (April 6, 1867). This is by far the best of his plays, and would certainly be included in the repertory of a National Theatre. It has been seen on the stage so recently that I need not describe it in detail. You remember how, in the first act, the Hon. George d'Alroy marries Esther Eccles, an obscure actress, daughter of a drunken and worthless old blackguard; how, in the second act, George is ordered to India on active service; and how, in the last act, we find Esther, with her baby, back again in her paternal abode—"the Little House at Stangate"

her husband being reported killed, and her father having gambled away the money which George had left for her support. This very long third act is the first truly remarkable achievement of the modern English drama. It contains two quite masterly episodes: the soliloquy of Eccles over his grandson's cradle, and the scene in which Polly Eccles (the comic heroine), under the guise of recalling to Esther the incidents of a ballet in which they had taken part, breaks to her the news of her husband's safe return. Old Eccles, drawn with an almost Dickens-like vividness, is the immortal type of the worthless loafer and soaker. "Good morning, Samuel," he says to his prospective son-in-law, Sam Gerridge:

> Going back to work? That's right, my boy,—stick to it. (*Pokes fire.*) Stick to it—nothing like it.
>
> *Sam.* . . . No, Mr. Eccles. I've knocked off for today.
>
> *Eccles.* (*Waving poker.*) That's bad! That's very bad! Nothing like work—*fo' the young.* I don't work so much as I used to myself, but I like to see the young 'uns at it. It does me good, and it does them good, too. What does the poet say? . . .
>
> For a' that, an' a' that,
> Your ribbon, gowd an' a' that,
> The rank is but the guinea stamp,
> The working-man's the gold for a' that.

I cannot resist quoting the immediately following passage in which the old reprobate is left alone in the house, with the baby sleeping in the cradle. He first lights his pipe—an operation every movement of which the dramatist prescribes with true pre-Raphaelite meticulousness. Then his thoughts revert from nicotine to alcohol, and the scene proceeds:

> *Eccles.* (*Goes up, L. of table, smacking his lips.*) I'm as dry as a lime-kiln. (*Takes up jug.*) Milk! (*With disgust.*) —for this young aristocratic pauper. Everybody in the house is sacrificed for him! (*At foot of cradle, with arms on chair-back.*) And to think that a *working-man,* and a member of the Committee of the Banded Brothers for the Regeneration of Human Kind, by means of equal diffusion of intelligence and

> equal division of property, should be thusty while this cub— (*Draws aside curtain, and looks at child. After a pause.*) That there coral he's got round his neck is *gold*, real *gold!* (*With hand on knob at end of cradle.*) Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh Class Legislation!—*is this right?* Shall this mindless wretch enjoy himself, while sleeping with a jewelled gaud, and his poor old grandfather want the price of half a pint? No, it shall not be! Rather than see it, I will myself resent this outrage on the rights of man! and in this holy crusade of class against class, of the weak and lowly against the *powerful and strong* — (*Pointing to child.*) —I will strike one blow for freedom! (*Goes to back of cradle.*) He's asleep. It will fetch ten bob round the corner; and if the Marquissy gives us anythink it can be got out with some o' that. (*Steals coral.*) Lie still, my darling! —it's grandfather's a-watching over you. . . .

Fortunately Esther re-enters and reclaims the coral before it finds its way to the pawn-shop.

The "Marquissy" to whom Mr. Eccles refers is the Marquise de St. Maur, George d'Alroy's mother—a terrible bore, with her long quotations from Froissart, and the great blot on the play. Her inauspicious influence pervades every scene in which she appears: it converts Esther herself, otherwise a charming character, into a ferocious snob. When the Marquise comes to the "little house at Stangate" to enquire after her grandson, Esther fires up and says, "Master d'Alroy wants for nothing," and when the Marquise hints at undertaking the care of the child, her daughter-in-law replies, "Master George d'Alroy will remain with his mother." This "Master d'Alroy" of Robertson's shows his utter lack of tact in dealing with the very subjects which most attracted him—the relations of the different strata of society. It is still more apparent in a play named *Birth*, written for Sothern, in which a proud Earl and a manufacturer of genius are pitted against each other, as representatives of the old and the new order of things. The manufacturer buys the Earl's ancestral halls, and, on the day he takes possession, is shot at and nearly killed by the Earl's gamekeeper, a

fanatical henchman of the Eaglecliffe family. Fortunately the feud is ended in a highly agreeable fashion. Providence having furnished the peer and the parvenu with a marriageable sister apiece, the Earl of Eaglecliffe falls in love with Miss Sarah Hewitt, while Mr. Paul Hewitt falls in love with the Lady Adeliza Eaglecliffe; and as the Hewitts are highly educated people of the most polished manners, there is no just cause or impediment why a double marriage should not demonstrate the author's favourite social thesis, namely that

> Kind hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood.

Before this happy consummation is reached, however, there is a point where the Earl is suspected of having fired the shot which wounded the manufacturer, and his life is threatened by the workpeople of the Hewitt mills, who all adore their employer, as workpeople are notoriously apt to do. Sarah Hewitt comes to warn the Earl of his danger, and does so in these terms:

> *Sarah.* I didn't come here to talk of birth, but in fear of death. See, the workpeople are coming here! I see their torches in the valley. Cecil Arthur Tudor, fourteenth earl, on my knees I implore you to fly!

This "Cecil Arthur Tudor, fourteenth earl" is an apt pendent to poor Esther's "Master George d'Alroy."

Somehow or other, his association with the Bancrofts and the Prince of Wales's brought out the best side of Robertson's talent, as nothing else did. *School,* founded on a German original, was even more successful than *Caste;* and *Play* and *M.P.* were passable comedies. Even this qualified eulogy cannot be extended to his work for other theatres. *Progress, Dreams, War* and the before-mentioned *Birth* are all incredibly bad. *Progress,* as its title indicates, is another attempt to deal with that conflict between aristocratic conservatism and industrial radicalism which so preoccupied the author's mind. The two sides of the case are stated in good set terms in the first act, where the engineer hero comes to survey the course of a railroad which is to sweep away the

stately mansion of a tribe of feudal magnates. But presently the play goes off into a silly love-story, having nothing whatever to do with "progress"; and no serious attempt is made to return to the theme. Robertson had no power either of thinking for himself or of giving dramatic form to the ideas of other people.

He died at the age of forty-two, within six years of his first success, and all the plays I have mentioned, good, bad and indifferent, belong to these six years. In all probability, he had done the best work that was in him; for in order to go further he would have required what he had not got and could not attain—namely, culture. What he did was to substitute everyday reality (and often triviality) of speech for artificial rhetoric and "wit"; to realise the dramatic value of "touches of things common"; and to apply his intimate knowledge of the stage to the hitherto neglected task of faithfully reproducing the external aspects of modern life. It is true that a certain advance in this direction had been made by Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris at Covent Garden and the Lyceum; but their reforms, I take it, were mainly in the department of costume. Robertson, at all events, went far beyond them in his attention to detail. "I frequently attended his rehearsals," said W. S. Gilbert, "and . . . I look upon stage-management, as now understood, as having been absolutely 'invented' by him." It is to be observed that the Prince of Wales's, the scene of his triumphs, was a very small theatre. The stage of the present Scala Theatre covers its whole area, auditorium, stage and all. Gas lighting, too, and other modern methods of illumination, were at the producer's command. Yet even at the Prince of Wales's scenic realism was not attained at one bound. It was not until the third production, *Caste*, that, according to Sir Squire Bancroft, "a distinct stride was made towards realistic scenery. The rooms, for the first time, had ceilings, while such details as locks to doors, and similar matters, had never before been seen upon the stage." Here one good effect of the long run made itself apparent. When a successful play might be expected to draw full houses for two or three hundred nights,

it became worth the manager's while to expend thought and money on attaining perfection in stage appointments.

The Robertsonian reform of the eighteen-sixties, and the foundation of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, has, I need scarcely remind you, been chronicled by Sir Arthur Pinero in *Trelawny of the "Wells,"* one of the most generous and beautiful tributes ever paid by one artist to another. The personal circumstances of Tom Wrench are not, indeed, those of Tom Robertson; but his artistic history is identical. In the first act, before he finds his great opportunity, Wrench meets his old comrade, Imogen Parrott, who, having secured a West End engagement, of course patronizes him:

Imogen. What about your plays? Aren't you trying to write any plays just now?

Tom. Trying! I am doing more than trying to write plays. I am writing plays. I have written plays.

Imogen. Well?

Tom. My cupboard upstairs is choked with 'em.

Imogen. Won't anyone take a fancy—?

Tom. Not a sufficiently violent fancy.

Imogen. You know, the speeches were so short and had such ordinary words in them, in the plays you used to read to me—no big opportunity for the leading-lady, Wrench.

Tom. M'yes. I strive to make my people talk and behave like live people, don't I—?

Imogen. (*Vaguely.*) I suppose you do.

Tom. To fashion heroes out of actual, dull, everyday men —the sort of men you see smoking cheroots in the club windows in St. James's Street; and heroines from simple maidens in muslin frocks. Naturally, the managers won't stand that.

Imogen. Why, of course not.

Then in the third act, where Rose Trelawny's fellow-players make their ill-starred irruption into Sir William Gower's drawing-room in Cavendish Square, we have this snatch of dialogue between Tom Wrench and Avonia Bunn:

Tom. *This* is the kind of chamber I want for the first act of my comedy—

Avonia. Oh, lor', your head's continually running on your comedy. Half this blessed evening—

Tom. I tell you, I won't have doors stuck here, there and everywhere; no, nor windows in all sorts of impossible places!

Avonia. Oh, really! Well, when you do get your play accepted, mind you see that Mr. Manager gives you exactly what you ask for—won't you?

Tom. You needn't be satirical, if you *are* wet. Yes, I will! (*Pointing to the left.*) Windows on the one side (*Pointing to the right.*), doors on the other—just where they should be, architecturally. And locks on the doors, real locks, to work; and handles—to turn! (*Rubbing his hands together gleefully.*) Ha, ha! you wait! wait—!

Again, at the beginning of the fourth act, we have a little scene between the old tragedian Telfer and his wife which may be called the epitaph upon them and their period. Imogen Parrott has raised a few hundred pounds, taken the Pantheon Theatre, and accepted Tom Wrench's comedy *Life*. The scene is the stage of the theatre. At the rise of the curtain, Mrs. Telfer is discovered in an attitude of dejection, seated upon a moth-eaten theatrical throne. To her enters her husband, coming from the green-room, where Tom is reading his play to the company:

Telfer. Is that you, Violet?

Mrs. Telfer. Is the reading over?

Telfer. Almost. My part is confined to the latter 'alf of the second act; so, being close to the green-room door (*With a sigh.*), I stole away.

Mrs. Telfer. It affords you no opportunity, James?

Telfer. (*Shaking his head.*) A mere fragment.

Mrs. Telfer. (*Rising.*) Well, but a few good speeches to a man of your stamp—

Telfer. Yes, but this is so line-y, Violet; so very line-y. And what d'ye think the character is described as?

Mrs. Telfer. What?

Telfer. "An old, stagey, out-of-date actor."

(*They stand looking at each other for a moment, silently.*)

Mrs. Telfer. (*Falteringly.*) Will—you be able—to get near it, James?

Telfer. (*Looking away from her.*) I daresay—

Mrs. Telfer. (*Laying a hand upon his shoulder.*) That's all right, then.

Telfer. And you?—what have they called you for, if you're not in the play? They 'ave not dared to suggest understudy?

Mrs. Telfer. (*Playing with her fingers.*) They don't ask me to act at all, James.

Telfer. Don't ask you—!

Mrs. Telfer. Miss Parrott offers me the position of wardrobe-mistress.

Telfer. Violet—!

Mrs. Telfer. Hush.

Telfer. Let us both go home.

Mrs. Telfer. (*Restraining him.*) No, let us remain. We've been idle six months, and I can't bear to see you without your watch and all your comforts about you.

Telfer. (*Pointing toward the green-room.*) And so this new-fangled stuff, and these dandified people, are to push us, and such as us, from our stools!

Mrs. Telfer. Yes, James, just as some other new fashion will, in course of time, push *them* from their stools.

After fifty years, Mrs. Telfer's prophecy remains unfulfilled. The ideals of Tom Wrench—natural dialogue and realistic scenery—remain in the ascendant, though various attempts have been made to dethrone them. The stage has room, of course, for many forms of drama to which they do not apply; and fashion may, from time to time, set strongly in favor of such forms. But I do not believe that Robertsonian realism, as it has been perfected by his successors, will ever be entirely ousted from the position it now holds; for it is only the last term in an inevitable process of evolution.

After Robertson's death, however, it seemed, for the space of fifteen years or so, as though his talent had been a solitary accident, fraught with no permanent consequences for the English drama. He had, indeed, his imitators, but they were, with one exception, men of far inferior calibre. The Prince of Wales's ceased to be the home of a new literature. The management fell back upon revivals such as *Masks and Faces,* and *London Assurance;* and when these proved insuf-

ficient, they resorted to France, and made great successes with Anglicised versions of two of Sardou's plays, *Nos Intimes* and *Dora* (renamed *Peril* and *Diplomacy*), which, being brilliantly acted and mounted, did positive harm by lending a new prestige to the ignominious practice of adaptation. Meanwhile Henry Irving was establishing his reign at the Lyceum, but doing practically nothing for the English drama. He had very little literary or dramaturgic sense, and his talent and training both led him back to the rhetorical tradition. He produced in the seventies two notable works inspired by that tradition, *Charles the First,* by W. G. Wills, and *Queen Mary,* by Alfred Tennyson; but neither took a permanent place on the stage. Wills's play was by far the best he ever did, but he spoiled it by introducing a silly libel upon Cromwell, with not even enough resemblance to be called a caricature. That heaven-born soldier and resolute, far-seeing statesman cannot possibly live upon the English stage in the guise of

> A mouthing patriot with an itching palm,
> In one hand menace, in the other greed.

Thus the fifteen years between 1870 and 1885 were almost as barren as the period which preceded the advent of Robertson. A word must be said, however, of his two successors and imitators, James Albery and H. J. Byron, and of a man who belongs in some measure to the same school, but whose peculiar genius defies classification—namely, William Schwenck Gilbert.

James Albery, who was nine years younger than Robertson, seemed at one time to be his predestinate successor. His first play of any note, *Two Roses,* was produced in June 1870, about six months before Robertson's death; and during the years 1871 and 1872 he poured forth a succession of distinctly Robertsonian pieces, such as *Two Thorns, Apple Blossoms, Tweedie's Rights* and *Forgiven.* Thereafter his productivity slackened, and he found his main employment as a singularly adroit adaptor from the French. His latest original play, *Jacks and Jills,* produced in 1880, was

a dismal failure. He died in 1889, a sadly disappointed man, if we may credit the epitaph which he is said to have composed for himself:

He waked beneath the moon,
He slept beneath the sun;
He lived a life of going-to-do,
And died with nothing done.

It seemed at Albery's beginnings that he might not only have carried on Robertson's work, but raised it to a higher level. He had more purely literal ability; he had a great deal more wit; and he had a vein of really poetic fancy. Unfortunately, after the success of *Two Roses*, he took a downward, not an upward, course. He relied more and more upon wit and fancy, and gave no thought either to constructive skill or to serious criticism of life. Wit for its own sake, wit unconditioned by character, has been from the first the bane of English comedy, and it was certainly the ruin of Albery's talent. Here is a scene which shows him at his best—the opening scene of *Two Roses*. The personages are Digby Grant, the gentlemanly adventurer who lives upon his wits, and his landlady, Mrs. Cupps. Digby Grant, I may remark, was one of Henry Irving's first successes.

Grant. Ah, Mrs. Cupps, how do you do?

Mrs. Cupps. (*Stiffly.*) I'm very well, I thank you. I have called for my bill.

Grant. (*Taking bill-file.*) I'm glad to hear it. I was afraid you'd called for the money. (*Takes bill off file and hands it politely.*)

Mrs. Cupps. Mr. Grant, this is not right!

Grant. Very likely not. I haven't cast it up. I never do. The tradespeople mean to rob me—I mean to pay them—we both fail, and the good intention is with me, thank heaven!

Mrs. Cupps. Well, I've not robbed you, and you'll find this is a debt you can't help paying.

Grant. Mrs. Cupps, that's new. I've always found them debts I can't help owing.

Mrs. Cupps. And yet you pay away money without occasion. Last night you gave my potman sixpence to fetch you a cab—but I must go without!

Grant. Mrs. Cupps, you do not understand the feelings of a gentleman. I cannot be under obligations to a potman—absurd! Your case is different. There's your account—I acknowledge the debt—I do not dispute it, or attempt to deduct overcharges, or take off a discount for cash like a common cad. If you bring it to me next year, I shall still acknowledge it; I can do no more—I am a gentleman, I can do no less.

Mrs. Cupps. I don't care for all your fine talk. I'll have my money, or I'll know the reason why.

Grant. What can be fairer? You *shall* know the reason why—I haven't got it.

Before the end of the scene, Grant, by pretending that he is going to marry a woman of property, wheedles Mrs. Cupps out of a loan of twenty pounds. The whole passage is a variant of several earlier scenes—notably of one (borrowed by Congreve from Molière) in which Valentine, in *Love for Love,* gets rid of a pressing creditor by a show of imperturbable politeness. There is, however, no verbal copying on Albery's part—it is quite possible, indeed, that he knew nothing of the earlier scene—and I confess I do not see in what way his wit is inferior to Congreve's.

It appears before the end of the act, that Digby Grant has inherited a large fortune, the immediate tokens of which are a cheque-book and a handsome balance at the bank. He has not had the slightest reason to anticipate this windfall, but he instantly seizes the opportunity of pretending to have been all the time a prince in disguise. He summons around him all the people on whom he has been sponging; with his daughters at his side, he thus addresses them:

My dear children—I know not why I should not say my friends—I have to some extent deceived you. I was, like Timon, tired of the hollowness of the world, sick of its tinsel show, and I came here hoping to find more simple joys, and sincere, though humble, friendship. I have not been deceived. I may mention as an instance the kind solicitude of Mrs. Cupps. She was quite unaware that it was in my power to repay her fully, she shall no go unre-

warded. Mrs. Cupps—a little cheque! (*Tears it from book and hands it.*) . . . Our Mr. Jenkins, a much esteemed, though humble friend, has a good heart. I have on various occasions noticed that he has, under the disguise of disburdening his sample-case, left various things for my daughters, such as—as shall be nameless. He cannot be expected to possess the refinement which would have made it clear to him that, even if we required such aid, our pride would not have allowed us to accept it. But he meant well, and I ask him to accept—a little cheque! Mr. Deecie, with whom I deeply sympathise, left my daughters a piano—he did not mean to offend—I thank him with—a little cheque. As for that young man Wyatt, though a plebeian, he would, had I found him worthy, have formed an alliance with me; but he is not. But a few moments back, to test him, I asked him to lend me ten pounds. He would have been repaid in thousands, but he had the worst vice of the vulgar—no faith, no confidence. I will have no more to do with him. I am indebted to him in some small sums—£20, £30. I wish never to see him again. I clear the score—a little cheque!

The story of the play is sufficiently sentimental—it turns out in the end that Caleb Deecie, a blind musician who loves one of Grant's daughters, is the rightful heir to the fortune. Nevertheless it certainly ranks second only to *Caste* among the plays of the period; and it shows traces, as I have said, of certain gifts denied to Robertson.

The works of Mr. Henry J. Byron need not, and indeed must not, long detain us. He had abundant and irrepressible verbal wit, but he was otherwise, as nearly as possible, destitute of talent. He was the author of thirty or forty so-called comedies and dramas, but he never invented a story that was not trivial, and he generally contrived to combine triviality with extravagance. His characters are the absurdest of rag dolls, conventionally masked and costumed, and with no backbone of consistency. Why, then, does he call for any mention? Because, for some ten or fifteen years—from the death of Robertson, we may say, to the coming of Pinero—he was the most prominent and popular dramatist of the day. *Our Boys*, produced in 1875, was the first play which ever ran for over one thousand consecutive performances, and he wrote several other plays which achieved great popularity. He no doubt considered himself

a worker in the Robertsonian vein, and in publishing his most ambitious comedy, *Cyril's Success*, he professed himself "tired of being termed a 'droll,' a 'punster,' and so on." But the plain truth is that he was nothing else—"he lisped in word-plays, for the word-plays came."

As a specimen of his dialogue, let me quote a famous, one may almost say a classical, passage from *Our Boys*. The old butterman, Perkyn Middlewick, is questioning his son, newly returned from the grand tour:

Middlewick. Paris now—nice place, ain't it?
Charley. Glorious!
Middlewick. 'Ow about the 'orse-flesh?
Charley. A myth.
Middlewick. Railly, though! And I suppose frogs is fallacies. Only to think!
Charley. Paris is a paradise. But Italy—well, there!
Middlewick. But ain't it a mass of lazy-roneys?
Charley. A mere libel. A land of romance, beauty, tradition, poetry! Milan! Venice! Verona! Florence!
Middlewick. Where the *ile* comes from.
Charley. Rome! Naples!
Middlewick. That's where Vesoovius is, ain't it?
Charley. Yes.
Middlewick. Was it "fizzin'" when you was there, Charley?
Charley. No, there was no eruption when I was there.
Middlewick. That's wrong, you know, that's wrong. I didn't limit you, Charley; I said, "See everything," and I certainly expected as you'd insist upon an eruption.
Charley. But, my dear dad, I saw everything else—Pompeii and Herculaneum.
Middlewick. Eh?
Charley. Pompeii and Herculaneum—they were *ruined*, you know.
Middlewick. Two unfortnit Italian warehousemen, I suppose.
Charley. Nonsense! They were buried, you remember.
Middlewick. And why *not?* It'd be a pretty thing to refuse an unlucky firm as went broke a decent—
Charley. You don't understand.
Middlewick. (*Bluntly.*) No, I *don't.*

This is not the silliest, but perhaps the most brilliant,

passage in the play. When this sort of thing could draw the public for twelve or thirteen hundred nights, what wonder if the stage fell into hopeless disrepute among sensible men and women, and had painfully to reconquer its prestige?

It is to be noted that Byron had won his first successes in so-called burlesque—that is to say in musical extravaganza, the dialogue couched in doggerel rhymes and bristling with puns. This art-form—if one may call it so—had been developed, mainly by J. R. Planché, from the old burletta, with hints from the French *féerie*. In Planché's hands it had a touch of literary grace and finish; but when his mantle came to be divided among a host of successors, such as Francis Talfourd, Halliday, Robert and William Brough, Reece, Farnie, Burnand and Byron, only a very small shred of the garment fell to each competitor. It was from burlesque that Byron imported into comedy his uncontrollable rage for punning. As the present generation has fortunately had no experience of these mid-Victorian imbecilities, I may quote a few lines from Byron's *Cinderella: or the Lover, the Lackey and the Little Glass Slipper*. It is the lackey, Dandino, who speaks:

> As I have made my bed so must I lie.
> Continuing *bed* metaphor, sir,—I,
> When quite a child, the blackest draught would drain,
> And took my *pill—oh!* on *account o' pain!*
> And as my youthful feathers all unfurled
> Seemed formed to make a *bold stir* in the world,
> Little dreamt I I should appear a valet as,
> For I seemed born to reign in royal *palliasse;*
> But suddenly the future seemed to frown;
> Fortune gave me a *quilt,* and *I'd a down.*

Is it not appalling to think that two generations of our immediate forefathers crowded to the theatre to hear and applaud drivel like this?

I mention burlesque because it was from this same school that W. S. Gilbert graduated. Even in that base employment his work showed a finish denied to his rivals; but he had no pretensions of what we should nowadays call a "high-

brow" order, as may be guessed from the very title of one of his successful extravaganzas, *Robert the Devil: or the Nun, the Dun, and the Son of a Gun.* He soon saw the error of his ways, however, and in 1870 produced *The Palace of Truth,* a fantastic play in blank-verse, which was followed by others of the same type, such as *Pygmalion and Galatea, The Wicked World* and *Broken Hearts.* There was in all these plays an unmistakable literary gift which could not but attract attention. At the same time there was a shallowness of thought, a hardness of style, and a cheapness of humour, not exempt from vulgarity, which detracted from their very considerable merits. At all events, they manifestly contributed nothing to that transition from the rhetorical to the real which is the main subject of our present enquiry.

Before long, however, he passed from blank-verse to prose, and produced in the seventies a graceful Robertsonian trifle, *Sweethearts,* two serious plays, *Dan'l Druce* and *Charity,* and two farces, *Tom Cobb* and *Engaged.* Can we say that in these, or any of them, he fell into line and furthered the modern movement?

Yes, perhaps in *Sweethearts,* but scarcely in his more ambitious works. *Dan'l Druce* was a conventionally sentimental costume-play founded on George Eliot's *Silas Marner.* The farces were original and clever but rather disagreeable fantasies in which the fun arose, for the most part, from the self-confessed egoism and meanness of the characters. Gilbert could never quite escape from that Palace of Truth which was the scene of his first serious play —a domain of magical psycho-analysis, where some occult influence forced everyone to utter his secret thoughts and reveal his inmost motives. There remains, then, one serious modern play, *Charity,*—can we find in it a continuation of the Robertsonian impulse, or a new departure towards sober truth of delineation?

Unfortunately, no. It is only a sentimental melodrama, in which the machinations of a hypocritical villain are defeated by the counter-machinations of a would-be comic

detective, who has conceived a chivalrous adoration for the heroine. Mrs. Van Brugh—so the heroine is called—is a lady with a past, who has atoned for her single error by devoting four-fifths of her large fortune to the reclaiming of her more erroneous sisters. It is one of these protégées who finally checkmates the villain in a miraculous fashion which no human being can understand. That Gilbert's intelligence was far higher, his criticism of life far more competent, than this play would indicate, it is impossible to doubt. The truth seems to be that he did not take his art seriously, and was carelessly content with the half-baked technique of his period—a compromise between realism and rhetoric. His two villains, a father and son, Smailey by name, are mere grotesques. Though they are the most infamous hypocrites, each is deceived by the other, and believes him a sincere and honest man. Here is a scrap of dialogue between the son, Fred Smailey, and the girl, Mrs. Van Brugh's daughter, to whom he is engaged:

Eve. You don't dislike Edward, do you?
Fred. You know very well that I dislike no one.
Eve. I'm sure of that. You love all men.
Fred. No doubt, Eve, I love all men. But you will understand that I love some men less than others; and although I love Edward Athelney very much indeed, I love him, perhaps, less than anybody else in the world.

Thus, in every second speech, the unctuous humbug reveals himself; yet he passes quite unsuspected until the very end. As for the father, he is a mere monstrosity. He thus addresses the private detective whom he has engaged to pry into Mrs. Van Brugh's past, and whom he passes off to her as a solicitor:

Smailey. The Smailies are a very old and very famous family. Caius Smaileius came over with Julius Cæsar; his descendants have borne an untarnished scutcheon for eighteen hundred years. In its interest I am bound to employ you, and upon your own most exacting terms, though I cannot think of your most con-

temptible calling without a feeling of the most profound abhorrence.

Fitz-Partington. Sir, I am heartily ashamed of it.

Smailey. You are a professional impostor; a hired lie.

Fitz-Partington. It is too true. I not only lie myself, but I am the cause of lying in others.

Smailey. For lies that have to be told in accounting for you I hold you entirely responisble. I wish that to be understood. I wash my hands of them altogether; and, when I think of the deep, deliberate, and utterly indefensible falsehoods that I have had to utter on your behalf, I tremble for your future—I tremble for your future.

Fitz-Partington. Unselfish man!

To excuse himself for some particularly infamous conduct to a woman, Mr. Smailey says: "In my case allowance should in common charity be made for follies that arise from extreme youth—and inexperience. I was barely forty then." And again, when he (quite unjustly) thinks his son desirous of keeping his word, and marrying the daughter of the discredited Mrs. Van Brugh, he says: "If Caius Smaileius heard that one of his race was about to marry into a tainted family, I believe the doughty old Roman would turn in his tumulus!" We are here a thousand miles away from all thought of verisimilitude. The writer's imagination dwells in a world of its own, bearing but a slight and superficial resemblance to that of every day.

He had all the less difficulty, then, in passing on into the confessedly fantastic world of musical extravaganza. I remember, not the first performance, but the first run, of *Trial by Jury*, at the Royalty in 1875, and I was present at the first nights of most of the Gilbert and Sullivan series. These delightful creations do not, of course, fall within the scope of my present survey, except in so far as they illustrate a deliberate and conscious renunciation of all effort after sober realism, and a reversion to the rhythmic saturnalia in which comedy began. But in the history of the English theatre they will always hold an honoured place, for they helped more than any other productions of their time to

restore our national self-respect in matters of the theatre. They were subject, of course, to the limitations of that style of humour which we all recognise as Gilbertian; but they were in the main ingenious and graceful; their literary form was admirable; and they invaluably enhanced the harmless gaiety of the whole English-speaking world. Sullivan was no doubt the rarer genius of the two, but he was never so happy as when writing to Gilbert's words. I desire to take leave of Gilbert, then, with the respect and gratitude due to an original artist and a benefactor of his race. He was a crotchety genius, a man of unaccommodating angles, whom it is impossible to fit into any pigeon-hole of classification. He sets all rubrics at defiance, very much as Mr. Bernard Shaw does. The two men, indeed, have much in common; and though in intellectual stature Mr. Shaw towers above his predecessor, I sometimes wonder whether his lack of Gilbert's genius for rhyme and rhythm is not a great misfortune to him and to us. It prevents him from following Gilbert into the realm of pure fantasy, and forces him to present his extravaganzas in the uncongenial disguise of comedies.

XI

In the four lectures which are to complete this course, I fear that those of you who are censoriously inclined may notice a tinge of egotism; for I shall be telling of a development which it has been my fortune to witness, and partly to chronicle, stage by stage. Though my knowledge of the theatre dates from about 1869, it was gathered, for ten years, mainly in the provinces. But in 1879 I became a regular London playgoer. Since that date I have seen every production of the slightest note, except during a few years when I have been abroad.

My retrospect, then, extends over more than forty years; and I should not be speaking to you now if it were not my earnest conviction that thirty of these years have witnessed a greater efflorescence of English drama than any similar period since the thirty years from 1590 to 1620, which include the whole life-work of Shakespeare. We have now no Shakespeare, granted; but I could name five or six contemporary playwrights whom I should be very sorry to exchange for any five or six of Shakespeare's contemporaries. No doubt they are not rhetoricians and lyric poets like the writers who flourished under "Eliza and our James"; but that is because modern drama has cast out the foreign elements of rhetoric and lyricism, and become a pure art of interpretation through imitation. It is the object of these discourses —I repeat for perhaps the twentieth time—to suggest to you that this purification, this *katharsis,* is not a sign of degeneracy, but merely the last term of an inevitable and most desirable process of development.

As I look back to 'seventy-nine and the early 'eighties, I confess I am puzzled to conceive how anyone with the smallest pretension to intelligence could in those years seriously occupy himself with the English theatre. The Robertson comedies in the 'sixties had brought with them a little flicker

of hope; but it seemed to have died away in the inanities of H. J. Byron, and to have left behind it nothing but inspissated gloom. The stage was flooded with adaptations of French drama and farce, with illiterate transcriptions of French opéra-bouffe, and with the punning vulgarities and idiocies of British burlesque. It was about this time that John Hollingshead of the old Gaiety invented a phrase and a form which have left their mark, not to say their blot, in theatrical history. The phrase was "the sacred lamp of burlesque," and the form was "three-act burlesque drama," in which Edward Terry, Edward Royce, Nellie Farren, Kate Vaughan and Connie Gilchrist stirred the great heart of the people to transports of enthusiasm. On the other side of Wellington Street, at the Lyceum, the Irving management was bringing a certain number of the intellectuals (a term not then invented) to the theatre; but it was doing practically nothing for the living drama. The Gilbert and Sullivan extravaganzas formed the one break in the clouds. They were at all events driving from the stage the infamous perversions of opéra-bouffe.

Those of us who frequented the theatre and wrote about it in those days were under no illusion as to the depressing state of things. Yet an invincible hopefulness possessed us, which I find, in retrospect, at once admirable and pathetic. We seemed somehow to scent the morning air, although the horizon, except to the eye of faith, showed no streak of dawn. We went about saying, "Lo, here!" and "Lo, there!" upon the smallest provocation; and the odd thing is that our judgments, though intellectually indefensible, were often, if I may so express it, intuitionally right. I read with amazement and amusement the other day what I myself had written about a play called *The Lights o' London*, by George R. Sims, produced in 1881; and yet I was essentially in the right; the play did show a certain return to nature, as compared with the adaptations and imitations of French melodrama with which it entered into competition. In the following year, the production of *The Silver King*, by Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman, re-awakened in no less a critic

than Matthew Arnold a long-slumbering interest in the theatre. Under the signature of "An Old Playgoer" he contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette* an article in which, after some criticisms of detail, he said:

> In general, throughout the piece, the diction and sentiments are natural, they have sobriety and propriety, they are literature. It is an excellent and hopeful sign to find playwrights capable of writing in this style, actors capable of rendering it, a public capable of enjoying it.

If Matthew Arnold were alive today he would probably read this article with something of the same feeling with which I re-read my notice of *The Lights o' London*. He did not see that the real distinction of *The Silver King* lay in the ingenuity of its plot; but he was right in recognising in Mr. Jones's writing, not, perhaps, a scrupulous naturalness, but at any rate a certain vigour. I remember how Mr. Wilson Barrett, under the erroneous impression that he had murdered a man, tore his hair and shouted, "O God, roll back Thy universe and give me yesterday!" It is not what you would call a realistic remark; but it is a natural *thought* vigorously expressed, and you see it has stuck in my memory —all the more readily, perhaps, as it happens to run into two lines of very good ballad metre.

But Matthew Arnold's "Lo, here!" and my "Lo, there!" seemed at the time to be ridiculously premature; for both Mr. Sims and Mr. Jones made haste to run down hill, producing a series of melodramas very much inferior to these first heirs of their invention. Mr. Jones, as we shall see, gallantly recovered himself; Mr. Sims did not. In the following year, 1883, Matthew Arnold again found a good word to say for *Forget-Me-Not*, by Herman Merivale and F. C. Grove, in which Miss Geneviève Ward had made a great success. But this play, though far above the average of its time, was nothing but a tolerably adroit imitation of French drawing-room drama.

Very much the same criticism applies to the whole life-work of Sydney Grundy, who nevertheless deserves to be remembered as a pioneer of the great revival. He was a

man of remarkable talent, who would probably have done great things had he been born twenty or even ten years later. He was in fact born in 1848, and came to maturity in the mid-seventies, just as the Robertsonian impulse seemed to have died away in ineptitude. In his schooldays in Manchester he had made the acquaintance of a Frenchman who had a great veneration for the works of Eugène Scribe; and this enthusiasm he imparted to young Grundy. When he came to London, it was Grundy's ambition to write serious plays; but he found no market for them, and was compelled to fall back upon adaptations from Scribe, Feuillet and others, which he executed with extraordinary neatness and ingenuity, in some cases improving upon his originals. Thus he compressed the five acts of Scribe's *Une Chaine* into the single tensely dramatic situation of *In Honour Bound,* and made of Scribe's *Oscar* a brilliant farce, *The Snowball.* Then he struck a gold-mine in Adelphi melodrama of the most unpretending type, such as *The Bells of Haslemere;* and, finding himself in easy circumstances, he re-awakened his early ambitions, and began once more to do original work. But alas! he had not moved with the time. He carried the ideas and ideals of the sixties and early seventies into the late eighties and nineties, subjecting them to the criticism of such men as A. B. Walkley, Bernard Shaw and Max Beerbohm. One of his plays, *Slaves of the Ring,* produced in 1894, had lain in his desk, I believe, for twenty years. Had it been produced in '74, it would have seemed a rather startling masterpiece; in '94 it seemed an anachronism. His moral and social criticism of life was antiquated; and technically he remained an apprentice of Scribe, whereas he ought to have assimilated the lessons of that master and transmuted them into a mastery of his own. I always remember, as an example of false ingenuity, an incident in a play called (I think) *Rachel,* produced in 1883. Near the beginning of an act, someone spilt a bottle of red ink and mopped it up with his handkerchief, leaving the handkerchief on the writing-table. The act proceeded from scene to scene and the handkerchief remained unnoticed; but

everyone in the audience who knew the rules of the game kept his eye on it, well assured that that ink had not been spilt for nothing. In due course, a situation of great intensity was reached, wherein the villain produced a pistol and fired at the heroine, who fainted. As a matter of fact, he missed her; but her quick-witted friend seized the gory handkerchief and, waving it in air, persuaded the villain that the shot had taken deadly effect, and that he must flee for his life. Even in 1883 this trickery was found more comic than impressive; but Grundy did not profit by the experience. So late as 1899 he produced a play called *The Degenerates*, which was full of misdirected ingenuity. Within ten minutes of the rise of the curtain it was brought emphatically to our notice that a certain Lady Saumarez had her monogram on all her belongings, even to her gloves; and we knew that she was destined to fall into a compromising situation, to escape from it, and to leave a glove behind her. When the situation arrived, we found that it involved a room with three doors, two of which were provided with such peculiar locks that, when once shut, they could not be opened from the inside except with a key. What interest could we take in a situation turning on such contrivances? And when the situation culminated, it proved to be a familiar trick of theatrical thimble-rigging: you lifted the thimble, and instead of Pea X, behold! Pea Z—instead of Lady Saumarez it was Mrs. Trevelyan who was concealed in Isidore de Lorano's bedroom. Grundy could never lay the ghost of Scribe, who stood at his elbow the moment he began to write.

Nevertheless he deserves an honourable place in the history of the dramatic movement. He had the gift of terse and telling dialogue, and he ardently desired to bring the drama into touch with real life. He satirized "society journalism" in *The Glass of Fashion* (1883) so effectively as to enrage the society journals; and he tried several times to deal seriously with moral problems, though his technique was too artificial, and his thought, perhaps, too shallow, to allow him to achieve any enduring success. As years went on, he more than once appeared in the character of a hostile

critic of the progress which had left him behind; but it is to his credit that, in the days of the Ibsen controversy, he did not join in the chorus of abuse. He had no personal liking for Ibsen, but he knew greatness when he saw it. He was, I think, the inventor of the term "problem play," which has gone all over the world; and it is characteristic that, though his own early ideal had been the problem play, he used the words in a disparaging sense.

One evening, in the autumn of 1881, I met Sydney Grundy at a theatrical club, and told him that I was going abroad, and taking with me the materials for a book I proposed to write on English Dramatists of the Day. We discussed the list of subjects, and I remember him saying with a smile, as though it were rather an original and surprising idea, "You'll have to include young Pinero!" I replied that I had every intention of including young Pinero, who had at that time only two or three curtain-raisers, one two-act and one three-act play to his credit. I have just re-read the essay which I eventually wrote, and find that in it I talked like a father to the actor-playwright, taking him severely to task for what I conceived to be the faults of his two longer plays, *The Money-Spinner* and *Imprudence*. If Sir Arthur were to read the paper today, I daresay he would agree with some of my strictures, while smiling at my general superiority of tone. But I hope he would recognise that the article was not, as a whole, of a kind to discourage a beginner. At all events, I said of his three-act farce, *Imprudence:* "To my mind the play seems to reveal a fresh individuality, and to promise an infusion of new and not unhealthy blood into our theatrical life." As these words were written some months before the young author made his first notable success with *The Squire,* I think I may congratulate myself on having "backed a winner."

I shall have a good deal to say of Sir Arthur Pinero which might tempt him to hint that I have not yet unlearnt my early foible of superiority. I shall have to own that his talent developed slowly, and that he has never quite shaken off certain limitations of thought and style. With all the

more emphasis do I wish to say at the outset that, in so far as any one man can be called the regenerator of the English drama, that man is Arthur Pinero. We owe him a quite incalculable debt. From December, 1881, when *The Squire* was produced, until September, 1901, which saw the production of *Iris,* his principal plays may be reckoned as milestones on the path of progress. Nor do I imply that his own progress stopped with *Iris.* On the contrary, his best work was still to come. With the new century, however, other men took up the running, and he no longer stood, or rather ran, alone. But he had smoothed the way and set the pace for these other men, some of whom have shown him very scant gratitude. He was the brilliant and even daring pioneer of a great movement.

Several of his early plays have not been printed (at all events in readable form) and are remembered only by theatrical antiquaries like myself. One of them, *In Chancery,* reappeared not long ago in the form of a musical farce. Another, *Lords and Commons,* founded, I think, on a Swedish novel, made a very deep impression on me, but as I did not happen to write about it, I cannot refresh my memory of it. He made a resounding failure with a play called *Low Water.* An incident which gave rise to much hilarity was the interruption of a love-scene by the silent entrance of a man with a sack of coal, which he shot into the ottoman on which the lovers had been sitting. I fancy that the unfavourable reception of the play was on the whole justified; but it showed an earnest desire to reproduce faithfully some of the discomforts of the condition indicated in the title. In other words, it showed that the author was heart and soul in the movement which I am trying to trace—the movement for making the stage a sincere, undistorting and unexaggerating mirror of real life. He failed in this case because his courage exceeded his tact.

It was with three brilliant farces produced at the old Court Theatre in 1885, '86 and '87 that Mr. Pinero finally established himself as a master of the stage. They are the work not only of a skilful playwright but of an original and

delightful humorist. I feel sure that if *The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress* and *Dandy Dick* were republished, with stage-directions calculated to help instead of bewildering the reader, and with illustrations enabling him to visualise the characters, they would be very widely read. *Dandy Dick* is probably the best of the three, but I own to a sneaking preference for *The Schoolmistress*, the second act of which, with its fantastic supper-party and dance, is one of the most delectable episodes I ever saw on the stage.

In 1888, Mr. Pinero made a very successful plunge into sentimental comedy, with *Sweet Lavender*. Its theme was trivial and its sentiment commonplace. What assured its success was the admirable eccentric character-study of Dick Phenyl, the broken-down, somewhat whiskified barrister, who still preserves the instincts and feelings of a gentleman.

I pass over an amusing but not very significant play, *The Hobby Horse*, and come to *The Weaker Sex*, produced in March, 1889, though written some years earlier. I single it out as illustrating one of the before-mentioned limitations under which the author's talent labours. His criticism of life is coloured by that instinctive, unthinking conservatism which prevails in stageland, and among its denizens, "the profession." I am not here to talk party politics; but I think all parties must admit that there is such a thing as traditional, uninstructed conservatism, just as there is traditional, uninstructed radicalism. The stageland of Britain, and I fancy stageland everywhere, has always tended to be behind the age. You may remember a significant passage in *You Never Can Tell*, where Mrs. Clandon, newly returned after eighteen years in Madeira, is assuring her old ally, Finch McComas, that she is still in the foremost files of time, and has brought up her daughter, Gloria, upon the sincere milk of philosophic radicalism:

Mrs. Clandon. Yes: I have not gone back one inch; and I have educated Gloria to take up my work where I left it. . . . I suppose she will be howled at, as I was; but she is prepared for that.

McComas. Howled at! My dear good lady; there is nothing

in any of those views nowadays to prevent her marrying an archbishop. . . . Am I howled at? No: I'm indulged as an old fogey. I'm out of everything, because I've refused to bow the knee to Socialism.

Mrs. Clandon. (*Shocked.*) Socialism!

McComas. Yes: Socialism. That's what Miss Gloria will be up to her ears in before the end of the month if you let her loose here.

Mrs. Clandon. But I can *prove* to her that Socialism is a fallacy.

McComas. It is by proving that, Mrs. Clandon, that I have lost all my disciples. . . . There is only one place in all England where your opinions would still pass as advanced.

Mrs. Clandon. (*Scornfully, unconvinced.*) The Church, perhaps?

McComas. No: the theatre.

This passage was much more pertinent in 1896 than it is today; and Pinero's play of seven years earlier may well have stood foremost among those which were in Mr. Shaw's mind as he wrote. There is some naïveté even in the title. I remember how amazed I was, even in 1889, to find that the phrase, *The Weaker Sex,* was not used ironically, but that the play deliberately set forth to prove, by the most barefaced psychological jugglery, that women were incompetent to take any serious part in the non-domestic work of the world. It seemed to me even then that such a title simply begged the whole question on which the play turned. And how did the author prove his point? By showing two middle-aged widows, prominent in the feminist movement, who accept as their masculine champion a blithering idiot of an M.P., and themselves collapse into something very like idiocy the moment the prospect of a second marriage is dangled before their eyes. One of them, the heroine, makes a pathetic attempt to renew her youth and beauty, only to find that the old lover whom she hopes to recapture is now in love with her daughter. The other, who may be called the butt of the play, thinks that the idiot M.P. is proposing for herself when in fact he is proposing for her daughter, and proceeds to act with a skittish juvenility which

is very painful. It is true, and fortunate, that the author argues rather by carefully-cooked example than by formal discussion; but the quality of such discussion as there is may be judged by one or two brief examples. Dudley Silchester is the *raisonneur*, the man of sound common-sense; Lady Vivash (played by Mrs. Kendal) is the heroine:

Lady Vivash. Have any of our ladies arrived?
Dudley. I think so.
Lady Vivash. Indeed?
Dudley. I saw some goloshes in the hall as I came in.
Lady Vivash. I wear goloshes in the damp weather. Perhaps they are mine.
Dudley. Perhaps; I didn't know at first whether they *were* goloshes.
Lady Vivash. What did you take them for?
Dudley. Gondolas.
Lady Vivash. Oh! After all, the size of a woman's foot is immaterial. A woman doesn't carry her heart in her boots.
Dudley. She does—if you say "Boo" in the dark.

Now that Sir Arthur has had an opportunity of seeing how women behave when you say "Bombs" in the dark, he is, I hope, less impressed by Dudley's facetiousness. A little further on, when Lady Vivash hears that her daughter, Sylvia, is returning from the Continent, she becomes utterly incapable of carrying on the ordinary business of life.

Lady Vivash. I want to see Sylvia so badly. (*Stamping her foot.*) Dudley, you don't tell me what to do.
Dudley. (*Shaking his head.*) Oh, you strong-minded woman!
Lady Vivash. I'm not! I mean I haven't seen her for so long.
Dudley. They're sure to be here almost directly.
Lady Vivash. What am I to do till almost directly?
Dudley. There's the Committee downstairs.
Lady Vivash. (*Impatiently.*) Oh!
Dudley. And your speech to prepare for tonight.
Lady Vivash. I can't think of anything now but Sylvia.
Dudley. No—and it is from this material that we are to mould our Cabinet Ministers of the future!

It is unkind, and perhaps unfair, to rake up this ephem-

eral chatter, which events have rendered as obsolete as any cuneiform inscription. I do it because we must be prepared to find, later on, that some of Sir Arthur's best work is marred by a failure to keep abreast of moderately enlightened political and philosophic thought.

His next play, in order of production, was one of those milestones of progress to which I have referred. *The Profligate* now seems terribly antiquated; but we were quite right in hailing it, in April, 1889, as the strongest piece of original drama that the stage had seen for many a long year. It dealt, sentimentally but frankly, with the problem which Björnson had treated six years earlier in *A Gauntlet*—the difference between the standards of moral conduct imposed by society on men and on women. The heroine, Leslie Brudenell, fresh from her boarding-school, has married a young man named Dunstan Renshaw, whom she believes to be the Sir Galahad of her dreams. She is terribly shocked when she finds that Dunstan is the intimate friend of a certain Lord Dangars, a nobleman of the most lurid reputation. At the Florentine villa where Leslie and Dunstan are spending their honeymoon, there arrives, by what one of the characters calls "an awful freak of fate," a certain Janet Preece who has been ruined and deserted by a heartless profligate. Just as she has told Leslie her sad story, she looks down the garden walk and, seeing Lord Dangars and Dunstan Renshaw approaching, cries, "It's the man—the man!" Leslie assumes that she is referring to Dangars, and when Dunstan introduces his friend, declines to take his hand or to have anything to say to him. Imagine, then, the collapse of all her ideals and her happiness when it proves that Janet has never seen Dangars before, and that it is Dunstan who is her seducer. The situation, though built on an improbable coincidence, is heightened by many skilfully-devised circumstances which it would be tedious to relate, and remains one of the most powerful ever conceived. For quite a long time, as stage time is reckoned, we see the thunderbolt hanging over poor Leslie's head, and we hold our breath as we wait for it to fall. The value of the situa-

tion is of course quite independent of any judgment as to the merits or demerits of Dunstan's conduct, or as to Leslie's right to expect of him an innocence equal to her own. If we admit, as we cannot but admit, that Leslie's ideals and Leslie's ignorance are, or were, true to nature—are, or were, characteristic of an immense number of women—that is all that is required to make the situation one of tragic poignancy.

It must be owned, however, that the ethical presuppositions of the play are a little too simple, and that the absolute and universal validity of Leslie's ideals is too unquestioningly assumed. The code of retributive justice which finds Dunstan's one possible expiation in suicide belongs rather to the mid-Victorian theatre than to real life. The standard-bearer of this ideal, who permeates the play, is a sad blot upon it. He is a sentimental Scotch solicitor, Hugh Murray by name, who wears his heart on his sleeve in a way not usually held to be characteristic either of solicitors or of Scotchmen. Within five minutes of the opening of the play, we find him thus expressing himself, in his office in Lincoln's Inn, to a very remarkable confidant—none other, in fact, than the detrimental Lord Dangars, whom he detests and despises. He has told Lord Dangars that Dunstan Renshaw is that day to be married:

Dangars. May I beg to know who's the lady?

Murray. Miss Leslie Brudenell — an orphan — my partner's ward.

Dangars. Money? I needn't ask.

Murray. If Miss Brudenell were penniless, I should describe her as a millionaire. She is very sweet, very beautiful.

Dangars. You're enthusiastic.

Murray. No, barely just. (*Speaking half to himself.*) I thought the same the moment I first saw her. She was walking in the grounds of the old schoolhouse at Helmstead, and I stood aside in the shade of the beeches and watched her—I couldn't help it. And I remember how I stammered when I spoke to her; because some women are like sacred pictures, you can't do more than whisper before them.

Strange talk this for Furnival's Inn, and stranger still as proceeding, not from one old friend to another, but from a solicitor to a highly disesteemed client who has just remarked, "It's a deuced odd circumstance that I have been nearly everything in divorce cases, but *never* a petitioner." Hugh Murray, however, seldom opens his mouth without emitting a flower of sentiment. He indulges in a metaphoric fantasia on the theme of wild oats, which is too long to quote. The following brief reflection may serve as a fair specimen of his style:

> Women love men whose natures are like bright colours—the homespun of life repels them. They delight to hear their fate in the cadences of a musical voice, thinking they are listening to an impromptu; it's too late when they learn that the melody has been composed by Experience and scored by other women's tears.

The fact is that Mr. Pinero, at this period, was still a rather uncritical disciple of Robertson. He had immeasurably more power than his master, but was not exempt from the characteristic Robertsonian lapses of taste.

What we may call the last work of his Robertsonian period was *Lady Bountiful,* produced in 1891. Its first three acts are very able and beautiful, containing, in Roderick Heron, a brilliantly drawn variant of the Harold Skimpole type. Its success was impaired by the fourth act, which, instead of being brief and simple, was dragged out by elaborate staging and by the tiresome chatter of conventional rustics. I believe that, if Sir Arthur could be persuaded to re-write this fourth act, the play might even now be revived with success.

Two comparatively insignificant plays, *The Times* and *The Amazons,* intervened between *Lady Bountiful* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* That play, in my opinion, opened a new period in our dramatic history—a period to be dealt with in my next lecture. In the meantime let us go back to the early 'eighties and glance at the development of Mr. Henry Arthur Jones.

From a German dissertation devoted to *Henry Arthur Jones's Dramen,* by one Hans Teichmann,* it appears that

*Otto Meyer, Giessen, 1913.

between 1879 and 1912 he had written fifty plays, most of them in three or more acts. Whatever else he may be, this author is a born playwright, an irrepressible practitioner of the dramatic form. And he will certainly take a prominent and honourable place in the history of what he himself has celebrated as "The Renascence of English Drama." He has dramatic instinct in plenty; he has a certain sort of originality, and a certain sort of thought, of wit, of style; he has great fervor, if not great clarity, of imagination; and he has often shown himself a master of the art of dramatic story-telling. His work has been throughout distinguished by an honourable ambition. We have seen how Matthew Arnold applauded his first success, *The Silver King;* and this "approbation from Sir Hubert Stanley" had a determining effect on Mr. Jones's development. He threw himself resolutely into the pursuit of culture. He read the *Nineteenth Century* and he wrote in it. He determined that his work should be a criticism of life, and especially of that British philistinism which his mentor despised, and which he himself, with his yeoman ancestry and his business antecedents, had studied at close quarters. The trouble was that his culture did not sit very lightly on him. It scarcely seemed made to his measure, and he wore it with a certain self-consciousness.

He had been cradled in melodrama and could never quite shake off its gestures and intonations. The first play in which he felt himself free to give the rein to his ambitions was *Saints and Sinners* (1884). He wrote it, as he tells us in the preface, in conscious reaction against "the cheaper and coarser art of melodrama"; yet it differs from melodrama mainly in having no mechanical sensation-scenes. Its theme is that great melodramatic stand-by, the betrayal of a village maiden by an aristocratic villain; and the subject is treated in the most ordinary melodramatic fashion, even to the death of the erring heroine in the odour of penitent sanctity. The originality of the play lies in the picture of a poor dissenting minister tyrannised over by the grasping and hypocritical tradesmen of his congregation.

This is, or rather was, a new note, and did certainly differentiate the piece from ordinary melodrama. Matthew Arnold wrote of it: "You have remarkably the art—so valuable in drama—of exciting interest and sustaining it"—a very just observation, in which the critic goes nearer than he perhaps realised to the inmost secret of Mr. Jones's success. He also said: "I must add that I dislike seduction dramas—even in *Faust* the feeling tells with me"; but this remonstrance of the master did not prevent the disciple from recurring to the same motive in *Michael and his Lost Angel*, *The Physician*, *The Hypocrites*, and I fancy in other plays. Sir Arthur Pinero, as we have seen, used it once, in *The Profligate*, but I think only that once.*

It is impossible to attempt anything like an exhaustive review, or even a chronological enumeration of Mr. Jones's stately series of plays. They fall into two main classes: more or less melodramatic—or shall we say picturesque?—dramas of passion, and more or less frivolous comedies of intrigue. Mr. Jones is an intense believer (for dramatic purposes, at any rate) in what Racine calls

Venus toute entière à sa proie attachée

—that sort of love which descends upon its victim like a typhoon, but, unlike a typhoon, lasts for a whole lifetime. The lifetime, indeed, is apt to be short, for the patient generally emerges from the tempest a battered wreck. Such is the love of Judah Llewellyn for Vashti Dethic in *Judah*, of Philos Ingarfield for Cynthia Greenslade in *The Crusaders*, of David Remon for Dulcie Larondie in *The Masqueraders*, of the Rev. Michael Feversham for Audrie Lesden in *Michael and his Lost Angel*, of Dr. Lewin Carey for Edana Hinde in *The Physician*. In all these plays, but especially in the first and last, there is excellent material. I should not be surprised if the playwrights of fifty years hence found in Mr. Jones's works a mine of dramatic suggestion. But in all of them there is somehow a lack of intellectual subtlety, and

**Sweet Lavender* turns upon a case of seduction in the far past.

a search after scenic effect of the picture-poster order, which greatly detract from their ultimate value.

The theme of *Judah* is this: Judah Llewellyn, an eloquent young Methodist preacher, of partly Welsh and partly Jewish descent, falls desperately in love with Vashti Dethic, a young woman who pretends to miraculous powers of healing, and whom he regards as a creature next-door to divine. She does, indeed, work a certain number of faith-cures; and to strengthen the faith of her patients she pretends to undergo long periods of fasting, food being surreptitiously conveyed to her by her father, a charlatan and a swindler. Challenged by a certain Professor Jopp, she consents to undergo a test, being imprisoned in the keep of an old castle (great opportunity for the scene-painter!), with the Professor's daughter for her jailor. The conditions are absurdly lax, and up to the eighteenth day of the twenty-one days agreed upon, old Dethic succeeds in conveying supplies to her. At this point the watch becomes stricter; but still the father (after an amazing game at hide-and-seek) would succeed in outwitting it, were it not that there is a sentinel on whom he does not reckon—namely, Judah Llewellyn, who has ensconced himself in a convenient niche whence he can gaze upon his lady-love's windows. He sees her father handing food to her, and then solemnly perjures himself in declaring that he has seen nothing of the sort. Such is the general respect for his veracity that this testimony is held to prove her miraculous powers; but the furies of remorse pursue the perjurer until, in the last act, he confesses his sin and resigns his ministry.

This was quite a remarkable play for its date (1890) and might make a good play at any time; but the clumsy and bewildering hide-and-seek of the "picturesque" second act would have to be eliminated, along with the devastating "comic relief" afforded by the grotesque Juxon Prall and Sophie Jopp—a pair who, under different aliases, and with slight variations of absurdity, wander through too many of Mr. Jones's plays.

The heroine of *The Masqueraders* is a young woman of

the fox-hunting classes who, having come down in the world, thinks the profession of barmaid more desirable than that of nurse or governess. At a rackety hunt-ball, a subscription is raised for the family of a deceased huntsman. Someone proposes that one kiss from the beautiful barmaid, Dulcie Larondie, shall be put up to auction for this worthy purpose. The contest lies between Sir Brice Skene, a dissipated and wicked baronet, and David Remon, a virtuous astronomer. The bidding mounts up from ten guineas to twenty—thirty—forty—fifty: then to one hundred guineas—then three hundred—five hundred—one thousand—fifteen hundred. Now we have been told that David Remon's whole worldly goods amount to two thousand pounds and no more; consequently we are duly thrilled when he bids two thousand pounds—his whole fortune—for a single kiss. The wicked baronet goes one better—he bids three thousand guineas; and then, by way of keeping it all in the family, he announces his intention of marrying the lady. She, being professionally inured to alcoholic advances, offers no objection; and thus Dulcie Larondie becomes Lady Skene.

In a couple of years or so, drink and gambling bring the wicked baronet to beggary, and he not only allows, but orders, his wife to accept money from David Remon, who has meanwhile come in for a legacy of two hundred thousand pounds. Fortunately David is a man of the strictest principles—all astronomers are. But on the eve of starting on an astronomical expedition from which he has little chance of returning, he cannot bear the thought of leaving Dulcie and her child to the tender mercies of Sir Brice; so he challenges that inveterate gambler to a little flutter—he will stake his whole fortune against Sir Brice's wife and daughter. The flutter is very brief—they simply cut the cards—and David, having won the best of three, becomes (it would seem) the moral, if not legal, owner of Lady and Miss Skene. Now, for a moment, his virtue falters—he is tempted to abandon his astronomical expedition (for the result of which the whole scientific world is gasping) and devote himself to cultivating his newly acquired property. But ideal counsels

prevail, and he starts for malarial West Africa, merely giving Dulcie a rendezvous in a "little star in Andromeda" which twinkles a good deal in his conversation. He has, of course, left his two hundred thousand pounds to Lady Skene, taking precautions, I hope, to keep it out of the clutches of Sir Brice, who is likely to trouble her with renewed attentions when he learns that she has come in for ten thousand pounds a year.

It is obvious that Mr. Jones is here attempting, not a realistic, but an imaginative treatment of life—a quite legitimate aim. The trouble is that the imagination is not of very distinguished quality. The talk about the star in Andromeda scarcely takes rank with the "brave translunary things" of literature. David Remon has a younger brother, Eddy, who plays the part of a sort of crack-brained Puck throughout the play. We first encounter him at the hunt-ball, where he puts his fingers in his ears, crying, "Oh! oh! oh! Those wretched musicians! They were playing horribly in tune, as if the world were full of harmony. I must get a tin kettle and put them out." The title, *The Masqueraders,* alludes to an idea on which David Remon is fond of harping, that we are not real people, but only the figures in a carnival revel—as though there were no reality beneath the masks of *Mardi Gras.* Philosophic criticism of reality is one thing, this facile fantasticating is quite another. To do Mr. Jones justice, he himself very aptly pricks his hero's bubble in this little passage between Dulcie and her sister, a hard-working nurse:

Dulcie. Nell, Mr. Remon has an odd idea that this world isn't real.

Helen. The cure for that is to earn half-a-crown a day and live on it.

Judah and *The Masqueraders* must serve as specimens of Mr. Jones's more ambitious and imaginative work. There is a great deal of vigour and a certain individuality in it. The pity is that the world of his imagination is not sun-lit but lime-lit.

To his works of a lighter order I have applied the term comedies of intrigue. Perhaps they might better have been called satiric comedies. Sometimes they flagellate Philistinism with a scourge remotely modelled on that of Matthew Arnold; sometimes, on the other hand, they scoff at idealism. An instance of the former class is *The Triumph of the Philistines and how Mr. Jorgan preserved the morals of Market Pewbury under very trying circumstances;* an instance of the latter class is *The Crusaders.* The effectiveness of the satire is somewhat diminished by the fact that it is a little difficult to recognise either real Philistines or real idealists in the victims of Mr. Jones's persiflage. More often he leaves extremes alone and applies an indulgent, featherweight lash, which seems to caress rather than sting, to the foibles and frailties of polite and opulent society. His masterpiece in this style is unquestionably *The Liars,* a comedy so bright and entertaining that it has a fair chance of being remembered when other pieces of the same type are forgotten—such pieces as *The Case of Rebellious Susan, The Manœuvres of Jane, Whitewashing Julia, Joseph Entangled, Dolly Reforming Herself.* These plays leave in the mind a composite picture of people lounging in drawing-rooms furnished by the best artists of Tottenham Court Road, and constantly fluttering round the divorce-court as birds flutter round a lighthouse, but almost always coming off with their plumage nearly as good as new. There is no sin in this society that cannot be expiated, no wound that cannot be healed, by Mr. Jones's famous panacea for all the ills of matrimonial life—a little dinner at the Savoy, to be followed next day by a visit to a Bond Street jeweller's or a fashionable fur-shop. It is not a very edifying, nor even a permanently exhilarating, picture of life; but, with all their limitations, these plays stand both intellectually and artistically in a totally different class from anything (save one or two plays of Robertson's) that passed as comedy during the century between 1777 and 1877.

Mr. Jones's great quality, however,—as I have already said and as Matthew Arnold discerned,—is his knack of

"exciting interest and of sustaining it." Take, for instance, the opening of *The Physician*, produced in 1897, with Sir Charles Wyndham in the part of Dr. Lewin Carey. The scene is the doctor's consulting-room:

Enter, door at back, Viccars, Dr. Carey's butler, showing in Walter Amphiel. Amphiel is a pale, thin, and very delicate-looking man about thirty; striking, earnest features, with a winning, lovable expression; rather weak mouth; restless, furtive eyes with a hunted look in them.

Viccars. Dr. Carey is attending a consultation, sir, but I expect him back shortly.

Amphiel. I'll wait.

Viccars. What name shall I say?

Amphiel. My name doesn't matter. I'll wait. (*Exit Viccars.*)

(*Amphiel furtively watches Viccars off, and as soon as the door has closed, goes quickly to the bookshelves, runs his eye eagerly over them as if searching for something, takes out a particular book, looks at index, opens it at a certain page, sits down, reads eagerly.*)

(*Enter Viccars at back, showing in Dr. Brooker, a middle-aged man, brisk, genial, robust. . . . As Brooker enters, Amphiel shows recognition and a little embarrassment, hiding his head behind his book.*

Brooker. (*Entering.*) Thank you, Viccars. Dr. Carey does expect me, doesn't he?

Viccars. Yes, sir. He left word if you came that he'd be back almost at once. Shall I get you anything after your journey, sir?

Brooker. No, thank you. Well, just a cup of tea, if you'll be so good. (*Exit Viccars at back.*)

Brooker. (*Sitting down, catches sight of Amphiel's face as he looks up furtively from his book.*) I beg pardon, my name is Brooker—Dr. Brooker of Folkestone. I've had the pleasure of meeting you somewhere?

Amphiel. (*With slight embarrassment.*) I think not—I don't remember you.

Brooker. (*Still looking at him.*) I suppose I was mistaken—your face seemed familiar to me. (*A little pause.*)

Amphiel. Very interesting place, a doctor's consulting-room.

Brooker. H'm—not very—to the doctor.

Amphiel. This room, for instance. How many strange stories and confessions these walls must have listened to! How many men and women must have opened that door with hope in their hearts and received their death-sentence, sitting perhaps where I am sitting now.

Brooker. Oh, don't speak of us as if we were bloodthirsty hanging judges. Say rather how many men have entered that door with despair in their hearts, and gone out cheered and comforted!

Amphiel. Dr. Carey is marvellously skilful in certain—certain nervous diseases, isn't he?

Brooker. He's marvellously skilful in all kinds of diseases. He has made a great reputation with nerve diseases, simply because this is a nervous age. Everybody is suffering from neurasthenia today. Except myself, thank God!

(*Viccars re-enters with tea on salver, which he brings to Dr. Brooker. Amphiel puts book on table open.*)

Brooker. (*Looking steadily at Amphiel.*) Surely I—didn't you consult me one Sunday evening three or four years ago?

Amphiel. No, no, I've never met you. (*To Viccars.*) Dr. Carey hasn't returned? (*Takes out watch.*) I'll call again by and by.

(*Exit Amphiel at back, rather hurriedly.*)

Viccars. (*At door, looking after him, calls off.*) The door, Thomas.

(*Meanwhile Brooker has taken up the book which Amphiel has put down. He looks at the page, raises his eyebrows, puts book on table again, leaving it open.*)

Not three minutes have passed since the rise of the curtain; there has not been a word of formal exposition; yet I can remember today how keenly my interest was aroused on the first night, and how I admired the skill of the thing. There is one slight and easily remediable flaw—a slip in Mr. Jones's technique. It is very unlikely that Amphiel would leave the book open on the table. In all probability, on the contrary, he would be exceedingly careful to replace it on the shelf. But it might be bound in a bright colour,

so that Dr. Booker could easily pick it out, glance at the title, raise his eyebrows, and put it back again. This would be not only more probable, but a more effective piece of business. It is a measure of the delicacy of modern theatrical art that such trifles may sometimes make or mar a scene.

The solution of the mystery is that Amphiel, a rich man, noted as an enthusiastic and munificent labourer in the cause of temperance, is in fact a dipsomaniac, subject to periodical lapses into degrading debauchery. He is engaged to a seraphic young person named Edana Hinde, who has not the remotest suspicion of his infirmity. Dr. Carey conceives for her one of those intense Jonesian passions to which I have referred, but nevertheless struggles with all his might to banish the curse that weighs on Amphiel's life. His efforts are vain and Amphiel dies, which is much the best thing he can do; so that all may be said to end happily. If Mr. Jones would re-write the play and eliminate the passages of picturesque melodrama which mar the later acts, it might take a permanent place in dramatic literature.

But Mr. Jones's masterpiece in dramatic story-telling is undoubtedly *Mrs. Dane's Defence*. One scene in the third act of this play is one of the best things of its kind ever written. The heroine is trying to conceal the fact that her real name is not Mrs. Dane, but Felicia Hindemarsh, a woman of badly blemished reputation. She has thrown dust in the eyes of everyone, including Sir Daniel Carteret, a famous lawyer. He, however, requires definite information on one or two points before coming forward as her champion. He begins to question her on these points in the most gentle and considerate way. She has her story pat, and for a time all goes smoothly. Then a single slip of the tongue —nothing more than the substitution of a plural for a singular pronoun—puts Sir Daniel on his guard. His questions become more searching: she involves herself in evasions, contradictions, semi-confessions: and at last, after she has been on the rack for half-an-hour, he turns upon the poor, cowering creature with the words, "Woman, you are lying

—you are Felicia Hindemarsh!" She crumples up before him, and tells her whole piteous story.

The scene is a magnificent one,* and it is only a consummate example of Mr. Jones's gift of wringing the last drop of drama out of a situation. And, as we listen to the dialogue, we cannot but be conscious that we have got utterly away both from the convention of wit and the convention of rhetoric—from the whole exaggerative and falsifying apparatus, in short, that had come down to our own time from the days when drama was a rite of hero-worship or a propitiation of the deities, the daimons, of corn and wine. "Flat and commonplace!" some people may say; but it is not flat and commonplace, for it is tingling with human emotion, with hope, fear, suspense, foreboding, despair; and every speech, while perfectly natural in the situation, is placed, with the deftness of a mosaic artist, just where it is needed, now to accelerate, and again to retard, the gradual *dégringolade* of the unhappy woman from the summit of triumph to the gulf of misery. Let those who profess to think drama of this kind a despicable affair produce anything approaching it in intellectual cunning.

Some critics have exalted Mr. Jones at the expense of Sir Arthur Pinero, for no better reason than that he has a somewhat truer ear for the rhythms, or rather for the vocabulary, of everyday speech. For my part I do not think that there is any comparison between the two men. Mr. Jones is a man of robust talent; Sir Arthur Pinero, in despite of certain weaknesses, is an original dramatic genius. Remember that I have as yet spoken only of his minor works. But as I am here taking leave of Mr. Jones, I wish to point out that in his better plays we have the modern formula complete. His endeavour is to imitate with absolute fidelity the surfaces of modern life. He may often fail in that endeavour and imitate badly, and he may at best get very little below the surfaces. But we find in his work, perhaps earlier

*Without borrowing a single motive or incident, Mr. Jones has compressed into this play, and especially into this scene, the whole emotional effect of an intensely dramatic *cause célèbre*, the Osborne pearl case. I guessed when I saw the play that it had been suggested by this trial, and Mr. Jones told me that I was right.

than in that of any other playwright, a form of drama in which the aims of modern realism are constantly in view and frequently achieved. The before-mentioned Herr Hans Teichmann, with true German industry, has compiled a statistical table showing how he begins by freely using the soliloquy and the aside, but how they occur less and less frequently in each succeeding play, until at last they disappear almost entirely. This is very significant.

The 'eighties and early 'nineties brought to the front several other playwrights of real note. Mr. Haddon Chambers in *Captain Swift* (1888) added a phrase to the language—"the long arm of coincidence." I well remember the laugh with which it was received when it was first spoken. Other plays, such as *The Idler* and *John-a-Dreams*, were of very moderate merit. He did not give the true measure of his talent until he produced in 1899 his admirable comedy, *The Tyranny of Tears*. In 1885 Mr. R. C. Carton produced, with the late Cecil Raleigh, a clever comic melodrama, *The Great Pink Pearl*. In the early 'nineties he devoted himself to Robertsonian sentiment in *Sunlight and Shadow*, *Liberty Hall* and *Robin Goodfellow*. He, too, did not show what he could really do until the very last years of the century, when he produced those brilliant light comedies, *Lord and Lady Algy*, *Wheels Within Wheels* and *Lady Huntworth's Experiment*.

There remains one dramatist to be mentioned before I close this survey of what may be called essentially the drama of the 'eighties: for though many of the plays I have dealt with were actually produced in the 'nineties, they were unaffected, or very slightly affected, by the new influences which came into play about 1891. The dramatist I mean is Oscar Wilde, whose theatrical career was comprised between the years 1892 and 1895. He was the most exquisite stylist that had written for the stage since Congreve, and his wit, though it often condescended to the use of a mechanical process, and often to something very like plagiarism, was copious, audacious and occasionally profound. But he treated the art of the dramatist with contemptuous

insincerity. His three serious comedies, *Lady Windermere's Fan, A Woman of No Importance* and *The Ideal Husband*, are in reality mere drawing-room melodramas, and conventional ones at that. He was a born playwright in the sense that, from his very first attempt, he seemed to have the tricks of technique at his fingers' ends, and to know by instinct what would be effective on the stage. But there was no real substance in his work. One feels that in his heart he despised the stories he was telling, and took a cynical pleasure in fooling his public to the top of their bent. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* we have the old, old tale of a husband willing to risk his whole domestic happiness and incur the most injurious suspicions, in order to conceal from his wife a blot in her own scutcheon, the knowledge of which might cause her some pain, but infinitely less than that which his absurd quixotism inflicts upon her. In *A Woman of No Importance* a witty reprobate—not a baronet, but a peer—is punished for his past sins when, meeting his illegitimate son, he hears the good old *voix du sang*, and yields himself up to transports of parental affection, only to find that neither his son nor his son's mother will have anything to say to him. In *An Ideal Husband* the author ostensibly sets forth to treat the question whether a single lapse into dishonesty should necessarily end the career of an able public servant. The point is doubtless an arguable one, but only on the assumption that the peccant official has fully realised the error of his ways, and is capable of integrity. This assumption Oscar Wilde makes haste to nullify, by showing that he is as great a scoundrel as ever, and is perfectly prepared to sell his country a second time at the bidding of a blackmailer. These plays, in short, are very bad plays, clothed in shimmering robes of tinsel, not without some admixture of real cloth-of-gold. *The Importance of Being Earnest* stands on a different level. It is a delightful piece of original humour, which unfortunately degenerates in the last act into rather poor farce. The continued popularity of Wilde in Germany must, I think, be taken largely as a political demonstration—a wilful glorification of a man

whom England cast out. But there is no doubt a certain section of the German public which takes drawing-room melodrama seriously.

I have said that, according to my reading of dramatic history, certain new influences came into play about 1891, which made that year a convenient and not quite arbitrary starting-point from which to date a new phase of the dramatic movement. One of these influences was that of the Théâtre Libre in Paris; the other, and incomparably more potent, was that which the whole theatre of Europe was in those years undergoing—the influence of Henrik Ibsen. My next lecture will open with a brief account of the coming of Ibsen and its consequences.

XII

The name of Henrik Ibsen was first heard in England, so far as I am aware, when Mr. Edmund Gosse published an essay on *Peer Gynt*, in the very early 'seventies. He did not come prominently into notice until *A Doll's House* was produced at the Novelty Theatre (now the Kingsway) on June 7, 1889; and it was two years later, in the spring of 1891, that the almost simultaneous production of *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* led to such an outburst of foul-mouthed abuse in the newspapers as has seldom disgraced the name of criticism. Now, after thirty years, faint echoes of that vituperative chorus still make themselves heard in obscure quarters. But I suppose I need scarcely waste time today in proving that, whatever rank Ibsen may one day hold among the great dramatists of the world, he was assuredly of their company, great among the great. There was a certain amount of excuse for the error into which criticism fell, though not for the style of its utterance. It so happened that the two plays which were first brought into notice, *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, touched upon the subject of hereditary disease; and the critics, as yet knowing no more of his writings, jumped at the conclusion that this was Ibsen's one preoccupation. As a matter of fact, they were the only plays out of about five-and-twenty which were in any way concerned with the subject. Then, again, Norway is a small country, and Ibsen was apt to lay his scene in the smaller towns of Norway, so that the manners presented had an air of provincialism, inexpressibly shocking to men who had been cradled in the aristocratic spaciousness and luxury of Fleet Street. I remember how Mr. A. B. Walkley (who, however, was far too able a critic to join in the general outcry) used to be much distressed by the naïve way in which Ibsen, in several of his plays, employed champagne as an all-sufficient symbol of the joy of life, without even

particularising the vintage. He might do what he pleased with the Ten Commandments, but this heathenish unfamiliarity with the wine-list was not to be forgiven. Seriously, the foreign and bourgeois manners depicted in Ibsen's modern plays quite naturally opposed a barrier to ready appreciation on the part of men who (at that time much more than at present) were accustomed to think of Belgravian drawing-rooms and the panelled halls of country manor-houses as the natural habitat of modern drama. What was less excusable in any man who called himself a dramatic critic was the failure to recognise the subtle mastery of Ibsen's technique. It was the common opinion of the day that he knew nothing of the art of play-writing—which was very much like saying that Lionardo da Vinci was an incompetent draughtsman. "Suburban egoist and bungler" was the mildest of the terms of contempt hurled at him by the late Clement Scott, the fugleman of the irreconcilables. "Suburban" he certainly was, if all the rest of the world is to be reckoned as a suburb of London. The relevance of the term "egoist" entirely escapes me. But when we come to "bungler," we are face to face, I think, with the most colossal ineptitude ever uttered under the guise of criticism.

What, now, was Ibsen's influence? It is very hard to define. Of direct influence upon individual dramatists he had little or none. The leading dramatists of the 'nineties —Grundy, Pinero and Jones—knew their business too well to despise him, but loved him not at all. Mr. Jones even lifted up his voice once or twice in the chorus of commination; while Mr. Barrie perpetrated a burlesque called *Ibsen's Ghost*. If I were asked to lay my hand on a single English play which was obviously imitated from, or directly influenced by Ibsen, I should not know where to turn. Mr. Bernard Shaw was, of course, his doughtiest champion and in some sense his disciple; but as for imitating him—well, I can only say I wish he had. But of indirect and what may be called pervasive influence, Ibsen had more, perhaps, than any other European writer since the time of Byron. He suffused the whole theatrical atmosphere, he coloured the

whole drama, of Europe. The so-called "free theatres" that sprang up everywhere in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties —the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Freie Bühne in Berlin, the Independent Theatre in London—drew their inspiration from two sources, Zola and Ibsen. The bracketing of these two men was a great error in criticism, but it found a measure of temporary justification in the fact that, at a certain point in his career, after he had finished *Emperor and Galilean,* Ibsen did try to suppress the poet in his composition, and to confine himself within the limits of prosaic realism. *Ghosts* became the watchword, in every country, of groups of young men who thought they recognised in him a Zola with a genius for the stage. What he really did was, not to confine his genius within the limits of realism, but to show that realism of externals—of environment, costume, manners and speech—placed no limits upon the power of genius to search the depths of the human heart, and to extract from common life the poetry that lurks in it.

In a very real sense, Ibsen may be said to have consummated the movement begun in England by T. W. Robertson, of whom he had probably never heard. That movement was, of course, not confined to England. It arose (as we have seen) from new material conditions, which obtained on the continent no less than here. Indeed, its actual origin may be traced to Eugène Scribe, whose works Ibsen had studied and even imitated during his early years in Bergen. In France, Germany and Denmark, no less than in England, the art of faithfully reproducing on the stage the externals of life had been perfected during the 'sixties and 'seventies. Then came Ibsen—his full originality was first revealed in *A Doll's House,* published in December 1879—just in the nick of time to prove that the new formula, in the hands of a great poet, was capable of producing masterpieces comparable to, and in some ways greater than, those which had been achieved of old under the rhetorical conventions. And this demonstration had a profound effect, not only on the best of those who exercised the craft of the playwright, but on the playgoing public. The theatre, in London, Paris,

Berlin, took on a new interest, in virtue, not so much of the actual achievements of English, French and German writers, as of the undreamt-of possibilities which Ibsen had revealed in modern drama. In scriptural language, he had magnified it and made it honourable.

I must not omit to mention another very potent factor in the situation. I have already remarked that during the middle years of the nineteenth century, the habit of reading plays became entirely extinct. If they were printed at all, it was only in the form of miserable sixpenny pamphlets for the use of amateurs. And the greater the value of a play the more chary was the author of letting it get into print, since he thereby sacrificed American stageright, and became, potentially at all events, the defenceless prey of piratical producers beyond the Atlantic. In 1891 a new copyright convention put an end to this deplorable state of things. In that year both Mr. Pinero and Mr. Jones began to issue collected editions of their plays. The first play published by Mr. Pinero was a comedy, *The Times*, and the first words of his preface were: "I have long hoped that the time would arrive when an English dramatist might find himself free to put into the hands of the public the text of his play simultaneously with its representation on the stage." That hope, he went on to say, was now fulfilled. Mr. Jones, again, ushered in *Saints and Sinners* with a preface beginning: "The passing of the American Copyright Bill is a fact of the highest import for English playwrights and for the future of the English drama." He never said a truer word. Not only did the possibility of publication encourage playwrights to think of their work as literature, and to give it a certain literary finish, but it also gave scope to their ambition by enabling them to feel that if they chanced to write over the heads of their public and their critics, and to fail in the theatre, their play was not simply lost in the gulf of oblivion, but might appeal in book-form to intelligent readers, and even to posterity. It was literally true that, for the fifty years between 1840 and 1890, England had possessed nothing that could reasonably be called a dramatic literature.

The thirty years which have since elapsed have given us a dramatic literature not only large in bulk but very notable in quality. I have to devote many shelves to my own very incomplete collection of contemporary plays, and it is constantly overflowing them, especially now that America is contributing its quota. The public, indeed, is slow to recover the eighteenth-century habit of reading plays, but even in that respect progress is being made.

Well, in the years between 1890 and 1893, all the influences which I have enumerated—that of Ibsen, that of the Free Theatres, and that of the American Copyright Act—were brought to bear upon the English stage. The immediate result was that on May 27, 1893, Arthur Pinero planted a new milestone on the path of progress in the shape of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. This famous play has been much over-praised and much over-disparaged. I myself was, I suppose, among the over-praisers; but, if so, my part was much more honourable than that of the stone-throwers. For the fact remains patent today, to anyone who will read *Mrs. Tanqueray* along with the best of its predecessors, that here was the first play which set the English drama fairly on a level, not, perhaps, with the most distinguished work of contemporary France and Germany, but with the average productions even of the best writers. It was a long, one may even say a decisive, step in advance; and the criticism which failed to realise this was that worst sort of criticism which I venture to describe as sterilising. Mr. Bernard Shaw did not enter upon his career as a critic until eighteen months after the production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray;* but he seized the opportunity of its appearance in book-form to place himself aggressively among the stone-throwers. He quoted Aubrey Tanqueray's speech to Paula: "I know what you were at Ellean's age. You hadn't a thought that wasn't a wholesome one; you hadn't an impulse that didn't tend towards good," etc., and then said, "On the reply to that fatuous but not unnatural speech depended the whole question of Mr. Pinero's rank as a dramatist. One can imagine

how, in a play by a master-hand, Paula's reply would have opened Tanqueray's foolish eyes to the fact that a woman of that sort is already the same at three as she is at thirty-three"—and so on. Yes,—one can imagine only too clearly how, in a play by *one* master-hand, Paula would have rounded on Tanqueray and preached him a long sermon on the text provided by Gilbert's Pirate King: "I don't think much of my profession, but contrasted with respectability it is comparatively honest." I fancy that, when it came to the scratch, even the master-hand would have hesitated to commit itself to such rank predestinarianism, such crude à priori psychology, as the dogma that "a woman of that sort is already the same at three as she is at thirty-three." Mr. Shaw, I am sure, does not really believe that all "women of that sort" are "of that sort" by reason of an inborn bent which can neither be confirmed nor counteracted by environment and circumstance. The fact is that Mr. Shaw was rightly conscious of a certain naïveté in Mr. Pinero's moral premises, and, instead of pointing it out reasonably and sympathetically, roundly attacked him for not having written the play which he (Mr. Shaw) would have written. This is the besetting sin of the artist turned critic.

The true weakness of the play Mr. Shaw entirely overlooked. He jeered at it because Aubrey Tanqueray's house had French windows, and because the characters now and then wrote and received letters—as most people unfortunately do in this world of ours—but he did not see that the real fault of the French windows was that they admitted an element of pure chance into the working out of the problem. If a dramatist sets out to study the case of a marriage between a man like Aubrey Tanqueray and a woman of Paula Ray's antecedents, he ought certainly to show its normal and probable consequences, and let them develop and culminate without any interference from the long arm of coincidence. Up to a certain point, Mr. Pinero seemed to realise this. He showed Aubrey's experiment breaking down on account of Paula's incurable instability of character and acidity of temper. But then he resorted for his catastrophe

to nothing inherent in the situation and springing out of character, but to a pure chance such as certainly would not occur in one case out of a thousand. It is no defence to allege that the world is very small, and that we all of us know of much stranger coincidences than the appearance of one of Paula's former protectors in the character of the affianced lover of her step-daughter, Ellean. It is a mere paradox to call this probable on the ground that the improbable so frequently happens. If Mr. Pinero had worked his problem out on its own basis, so to speak, his play might have been an enduring masterpiece, instead of a milestone on the path of progress, which, like all milestones, is there only to be left behind.*

Mrs. Tanqueray was followed by a series of plays quite immeasurably superior to anything that had been produced before 1893, by Mr. Pinero or any other living Englishman. His reputation at the present moment suffers from the fact to which I alluded a moment ago, that even "the reading public" does not read plays as it reads novels, and as intelligent people in France, Germany and Scandinavia read plays. I have just been refreshing my memory of these productions, and have done so with the keenest admiration and enjoyment. There are one or two trivialities among them—trivialities that would make the reputation of an ordinary dramatist—but the great majority of them are individual and powerful creations, treating novel and significant themes with accomplished mastery. To most of them, indeed, some drawback attaches—here an ill-conceived character, there a weak last act, there again, it may be, a hiatus in the psychological development. There are only two, perhaps, which stand above criticism—perfect things of their kind. But if we cannot say that Sir Arthur has produced a series of flawless masterpieces, we can at least say that he has written many of the most splendid individual acts in modern dramatic literature—acts which hold us breathless during their development, and which make us feel, when

*A brilliantly successful revival in this present month of June 1922 proves, however, that it has not yet been left behind. It has aged surprisingly little.

the curtain falls, that we have been through a poignant personal experience.

The immediate successor of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*, a far maturer piece of work. It is entirely admirable in its structure and development, but unfortunately marred by very grave mistakes in the portrayal of the central figure, Agnes Ebbsmith herself. The author did not understand the type of woman he was presenting—a type which swarmed in London in those years, but which he apparently knew only from hearsay and conjecture. By her own account she was the daughter of a freethinking revolutionary propagandist, whom she had loved, and under whose exclusive influence she had been brought up. Her mother, whom she describes as a termagant, had evidently excited in her nothing but repulsion. She has herself made some reputation as a mob orator. Yet she constantly uses expressions unknown to the terminology of her class, and it is evident from the first that she is more than half afraid of her own opinions, regarding them in her heart of hearts as daring and dangerous heresies. It seems never to have entered Mr. Pinero's mind that such a woman would be as placid in her rationalism as any bishop in his orthodoxy—probably much more so. In telling the story of her unfortunate marriage, she says:

> In spite of father's unbelief and mother's indifference, at the time I married I was as simple—aye, in my heart as devout—as any girl in a parsonage. The other thing hadn't soaked into me. Whenever I could escape from our stifling rooms at home, and slam the front door behind me, the air blew away uncertainty and scepticism; I seemed only to take a long deep breath to be full of hope and faith. And it was like this till that man married me.

Now, no one would pretend, of course, that this frame of mind is impossible, though it is hard to see from the lady's own statement where her "devoutness" comes from. One suspects Mr. Pinero of assuming that piety is an inborn characteristic of the normal girl, and likely to be proof against the evil communications even of a much-loved father. They would not "soak into" her faith-impregnated soul. It

is not necessary, however, for us to consider whether this is a tenable reading of child-psychology. Even if Mr. Pinero could point to individual cases, and say, "Such was the soul-history of Mary X and Annie Y," his Agnes Ebbsmith would still be a failure intellectually, since this soul-history is certainly the reverse of typical in the case of a woman of her class. Her speculative opinions apart, her emotional processes are interesting and true, so that a great deal of the play is very fine and moving. But unfortunately Mr. Pinero chose to make its culminating situation turn upon a violent recrudescence of the pristine "devoutness" with which he had endowed his heroine. At a crisis in her emotional life, a friendly parson has presented her with a pocket Bible. She receives the gift with something like obloquy, alleging that during her miserable married life she "trusted it, clung to it, and it failed her." As the padre insists on leaving the book on her table, she goes into a frenzy of exasperation and flings it into the fire. Then, the next moment, "with a look of fright and horror, " she "utters a loud cry . . . and, thrusting her arm into the fire, drags out the book." The curtain falls upon her kneeling on the hearth-rug and clutching the charred volume to her breast.

Had Sir T. Hall Caine devised such a situation, we should have had no hesitation in calling it sanctimonious claptrap. One could almost wish that it had been so in Mr. Pinero's case. The trouble is that he sincerely thought he was drawing the portrait of an advanced woman. He could not conceive a woman who had never dreamt of attributing to the Hebrew Scriptures any magical virtue. I am afraid that, in my last lecture, I smiled a little at the reverence with which Mr. Henry Arthur Jones sat at the feet of Matthew Arnold. I am bound to admit that some such discipleship would have done Mr. Pinero no harm.

But whatever may be the intellectual shortcomings of *Mrs. Ebbsmith*, just think what it meant to us, in 1895, to see a play which tried, even if it in some measure failed, to present the portrait of a rebel against moral and intellectual orthodoxies. It was technically masterly, and it touched on

some of the most serious issues of modern life. It went far beyond our wildest dreams of ten years before. Nowadays we have Mr. Somerset Maugham devoting a whole play, *The Unknown*, to a formal discussion of the question whether the facts of the World War are reconcilable with the dogma of the goodness of God, or even what someone has called "the ultimate decency of things." It is not a very brilliant discussion, unfortunately; but the fact that it is possible at all is largely due to the energy and daring with which Mr. Pinero, a quarter of a century ago, set about the breaking down of barriers.

The same year, 1895, saw the production of *The Benefit of the Doubt*, the first two acts of which are among the most admirable things Mr. Pinero has ever done. Theophila Fraser is a beautifully-drawn character, and her crowded hour of disastrous life is a piece of tense and vivid drama. The last act, unfortunately, is lacking in tension, and is marred by a *deus ex machina* in the person of a bishop, dragged in to embody unimpeachable respectability. In spite of this flaw, *The Benefit of the Doubt* would certainly hold an honourable place in the repertory of a National Theatre, and it is a reproach to our theatrical organisation that so human and moving a play should be suffered to lie on the shelf.

The Princess and the Butterfly, produced in 1897, is a charming but not very important romance. Its successor, *Trelawny of the "Wells"* (1898), is not only an exquisite comedy but a generous and beautiful tribute of loyalty to a great pioneer from his far greater follower. I have already quoted from it in dealing with T. W. Robertson. I do not know another instance in which dramatic history has been so faithfully and yet so livingly dramatised. Rose Trelawny is one of the most attractive figures ever placed on the stage; and to all lovers of the theatre the scene in which the almost impossible old curmudgeon, Sir William Gower, is softened and exalted by the mere memory of Edmund Kean, is at least as full of pathos as of humour.

Very different is Mr. Pinero's next production, one of his

great successes, and commonly reckoned one of his best plays—*The Gay Lord Quex*. I do not altogether dissent from that judgment; I fully admit that one act, the third, is one of the strongest pieces of drama on our own or any other stage. Only a master-dramatist could have conceived and executed the battle between Sophy Fullgarney and the Marquis of Quex. But it takes two dull and rather unpleasant acts to lead up to this scene, and one dull and rather unpleasant act to lead down from it again. The play, then, is scarcely an example of economy of means. The effect, superb as it is, cannot be called proportionate to the effort required to bring it about. Lord Quex is the last of those debonair and dissolute noblemen of whom Mr. Pinero was, in these years, rather too fond—probably because he had Sir John Hare to embody them for him.

In the first years of the new century, Mr. Pinero produced two plays which are bracketed together by their proximity in time, by the similarity of their titles, *Iris* and *Letty*, and by the fact that the two themes are, as it were, complementary to each other. *Iris* is the tragedy of a woman with the sweetest nature, but with no moral stamina, no backbone, so to speak. *Letty* is the tragicomedy of a girl who has plenty of backbone. Placed between two temptations —a life of luxury with a man whom she loves but cannot marry, and marriage with a rich vulgarian whom she despises—she for a moment dallies with each temptation in turn, but has at last the courage and self-respect to reject both. There is great charm in the painful story of *Iris*, but *Letty* is by far the better play of the two. Even its dramatically feeble last act, or epilogue, is artistically right. A mid-Victorian dramatist, if he had attempted such a theme, would either have made Letty die of what was called in those days a decline, or would have rewarded her virtue, à la Gilbert, by

> giving her in marriage
> To a first-class Earl who keeps his carriage.

Mr. Pinero does, indeed, marry her off, but it is to an

obscure photographer with whom she leads a contented and laborious life in a semi-detached villa at Neasden.

I quoted in my fifth lecture some extracts from the first and second acts of *Letty*. Some of you may have observed in the speeches of the leading character, Nevill Letchmere, a certain tendency to grandiloquence. It is partly a trick of manner deliberately and quite justifiably attributed to him; but when he addresses to Letty such a phrase as "the euphemism is Mr. Mandeville's" we feel that he is going a little too far. There is no denying that, for ten years or so, from about 1895 to 1905, Mr. Pinero seemed more and more to lose his ear for the niceties of educated speech. His uneducated speech is always masterly; the part of Hilda Gunning in *Letty*, for instance, is a perfect treasury of the raciest shop-girl jargon. But when he is not writing satirically, he is apt to make his people use pompous and improbable turns of phrase. Even Letty, a simple character enough, is capable of expressing herself in this fashion:

> To my imperfect intelligence, it seems that the first essential is to be capable of resigning oneself to a scheme of things which ordains that some women shall spend their lives in perpetual fag, while others—our more fortunate sisters, as they are styled—enjoy freedom and luxury galore.

This is surely something of a mouthful—in Letchmere's phrase, "I employ the vernacular"—something of a mouthful for a bucket-shop typist addressing two of her companions. The curious thing is that this fondness for using stilted phraseology is almost entirely confined to a certain group of plays. In *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* I have found only one phrase which seems to me out of keeping, but that is twice repeated. Lucas Cleeve says to Agnes, "The Duke has made himself the bearer of some letters from friends"; and to the Duke he says, "Will you be the bearer of a note from me to Sandford?" I can see no reason why he should not have said, "The Duke has brought some letters" and "Will you take a note?" Such little stumbling-blocks unfortunately become more common in the plays written between 1895 and 1905; and there are some critics—I am

sorry to say Mr. Walkley and Mr. Max Beerbohm are among them—who allow these little rifts in Mr. Pinero's lute to make the music mute for them, and are inclined to minimise his genius simply because his ear for current speech is not unerring.

Of two unimportant plays, *A Wife Without a Smile* and *Preserving Mr. Panmure*, I shall say nothing, except that in the latter, from the title onwards, Sir Arthur seems to have been imitating Mr. Henry Arthur Jones. It is a very good Jones play, but no more. *His House in Order*, again, though its diction did not escape castigation, was a very fine play, strong in character, admirable in construction, right in feeling. The relatives of the late wife were an amusing group, but so much caricatured as to be somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the play. It belongs to the second class of Sir Arthur's work, but stands clearly at the head of that class. It was one of his greatest successes.

Perhaps some of you, who remember *His House in Order*, may be inclined to say: "If this was a work of the second class, when are we coming to the first class?" My reply is that we have arrived. I said that Sir Arthur had written two plays which were above criticism—perfect things of their kind. Their names are *The Thunderbolt* and *Mid-Channel*, and they were produced respectively in 1908 and 1909. Here, unquestionably, his powers culminate; here he takes rank with the greatest masters of realistic drama.

The Thunderbolt is a study of provincial life. Edward Mortimore has died, it is thought, intestate, and his three brothers and one sister eagerly look forward to taking their equal shares in his very considerable fortune. They learn, to their great surprise, that he left an illegitimate daughter, to whom he seems to have been much attached; and it is still more surprising that he has made no provision for her. Rather to their chagrin, the lawyers insist on taking all possible steps to discover whether a will exists; but there is no trace of any such document. To the great relief of the family, their unknown relative proves to be a well-brought-up, high-spirited girl who, though she is deeply

grieved to find that her father has forgotten her, declines to accept anything at their hands. Helen Thornhill—that is her name—cannot endure the two elder brothers, but she strikes up a friendship with the youngest, Thaddeus, a struggling music-master, and with his wife, Phyllis. She spends three weeks with them while search is being made for the will; and every day Mrs. Thaddeus seems more nervous and depressed. At last it is decided that intestacy may be presumed, and the family is to have a meeting with the lawyers to arrange about applying for Letters of Administration. Just as Thaddeus is starting for this meeting, Phyllis breaks down, and confesses to him that there was a will; that she came across it on the night of Edward Mortimore's death, saw that it left everything to a woman she had never heard of, Helen Thornhill by name, and—destroyed it. Now that she knows and loves Helen, her remorse will not let her rest, and she makes a clean breast of her misdeed. Here, then, is the thunderbolt. Thaddeus, delayed by his wife's confession, arrives late at the family meeting. His brothers and sister, fully assured that each of them is coming into something like forty thousand pounds, have not only been gloating over the prospect, but have committed themselves to heavy expenses on the strength of it. To them Thaddeus has to break the news that they have no moral right to a halfpenny. The legal rights are not clear, but the lawyers are of opinion that, under the circumstances, the court would probably presume the existence of a duly-executed will. Thaddeus at first declares that it was he himself who found and destroyed the document, but under cross-examination this story breaks down, and it becomes clear that Phyllis is the guilty party. Needless to say, the enraged family suspect Thaddeus and Phyllis of having conspired with Helen Thornhill to trump up this story in order to rob them of their heritage; but their theory will scarcely hold in view of the fact that Phyllis is accusing herself of a felony and incurring a long term of penal servitude. How the imbroglio is cleared up I need not relate. In view of Helen Thornhill's fine character, it is not so very difficult; but even in the last act the dramatic

tension is admirably sustained. As for the act in which the thunderbolt falls into the midst of the family council, it is simply one of the most thrilling pieces of drama ever conceived. It is a little exasperating to find critics ignoring or pooh-poohing such work as this, while going into raptures over Ben Jonson's *Volpone* because it is old, and Becque's *Les Corbeaux* because it is French. I mention these two plays because they, too, happen to deal with heritage-hunting. Not, of course, that I present Sir Arthur Pinero as a neglected genius. He has had an extremely successful career. But I do say that such a masterpiece as *The Thunderbolt* has never been adequately appreciated, and that its author does not hold the place he deserves in the esteem of serious criticism.

A still greater play is *Mid-Channel.* It is the tragedy of the wealthy, childless middle-class household, without intellectual interests, without even social ambitions, without any of what may be called the shock-absorbers of life. It is the story of a husband and wife who have still, after fourteen years of marriage, a good deal of attachment to each other, but who have so given the rein to their habit of jangling and wrangling over the petty details of their luxurious existence that they at last drive each other to degradation, ending, for the wife, in suicide. The play, though not in the least brutal or, in a bad sense, naturalistic, is as unflinchingly cruel as a design by Hogarth. To the social historian of the future it will be an invaluable document, a living comment on the society-papers and on the matrimonial *causes célèbres,* of the century. As one reads it, one thinks alternately of the sensational suicide of this heroine of the Divorce Court, and the conviction for perjury of that other—the names have fortunately escaped me. But the piece, though unrelenting, is not savage. It excites our aversion, but it also touches our sympathies. Poor Zoe Blundell, so incomparably acted by Miss Irene Vanbrugh, is not at all a bad sort of woman. One quite understands the devotion with which her friends regard her. She is a victim of the hideous stupidities of our social and economic system. I

regard *Mid-Channel* as a more effective indictment of that system than any of the dialectical diatribes of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

And the odd thing is that the diction of these two plays is absolutely irreproachable. I do not mean to say that they possess the beauty of phrasing which we find in Congreve, or Oscar Wilde, or J. M. Synge. It would be out of place in works of such stern realism. But I have read them carefully from this point of view, and I find in them not a single uncharacteristic or pedantic or cumbrous expression. The language of *Mid-Channel* is particularly vital. It will one day be a linguistic as well as a social document. I do not know where else we can find the accent of the age, in that particular stratum of society, more vividly recorded. I cannot imagine anyone taking exception to the dialogue of either play, and I do not remember that anyone did. But neither do I remember any eulogistic comments from the critics who never lose an opportunity of magnifying and girding at Sir Arthur's occasional slips of the tongue.

Perhaps the most easily detachable passage in *Mid-Channel* is the scene at the beginning of the third act, between the wealthy stockbroker, Theodore Blundell, and the woman in whose society he has sought consolation after a particularly bitter quarrel with his wife.

The scene is a fine spacious room, richly furnished and decorated. . . . The telephone-bell rings and presently Theodore Blundell enters . . . and goes to the writing-table. His step has become heavier, his shoulders are somewhat bent, and he looks a "bad colour."

Theodore. (*At the telephone.*) Hallo! . . . Yes? . . . I *am* Mr. Blundell. . . . Oh, is that you, Peter? . . . What? . . . Want to see me? . . . Anything wrong? . . . Where are you? . . . Where? Café Royal? . . . Come along to me now, then . . . Oh, I say! . . . Are you there? . . . (*Dropping his voice.*) I say! Mrs. A. is lunching with me. . . . Mrs. A.—Alice. . . . No, but I thought I'd tell you. . . . Goodbye.

He is about to return to the dining-room when Mrs. Annerly appears in the doorway. . . . She is a pretty, charmingly dressed creature, with classical, immobile features and a simple, virginal air.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Advancing.*) I've told Cole we'll have coffee in this room. (*He nods and sits moodily upon the settee on the right. Resting her elbows on the back of the arm-chair at the further end of the settee on the left, she surveys her face in a mirror which she carries, with some other trinkets, attached to a chain.*) Who's that you were talking to on the 'phone, boy dear?

Theodore. (*Who is smoking a big cigar.*) Mottram.

Mrs. Annerly. What's *he* want?

Theodore. Wants to see me about something.

Mrs. Annerly. Business?

Theodore. Dunno.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Sweetly.*) He doesn't like poor little me.

Theodore. (*Indifferently.*) Doesn't he?

Mrs. Annerly. You know he doesn't. (*Arranging a curl.*) That's why you gave him the tip that I'm lunching here.

Theodore. Ho! Listeners—et cætera.

Mrs. Annerly. I couldn't help hearing you — positively I couldn't. (*Examining her teeth in the mirror.*) He's one of your wife's tame cats, isn't he?

Theodore. He's a friend of hers—yes.

Mrs. Annerly. *Just* a friend, and nothing else.

Theodore. (*Angrily.*) Now, look here, Alice—!

Cole, a manservant, enters from the dining-room with the coffee and liqueurs. Mrs. Annerly takes a cup of coffee.

Cole. (*To Mrs. Annerly.*) Brandy—Kümmel, ma'am?

Mrs. Annerly. No, thanks.

Theodore. (*To Cole, who comes to him with the tray—irritably.*) Leave it. (*Cole places the tray on the top of the piano and . . . withdraws, closing the door. Theodore rises and pours some brandy into a large liqueur-glass.*)

Mrs. Annerly. What's the matter with you today, boy dear? You're as cross as two sticks.

Theodore. Liver.

Mrs. Annerly. I don't wonder. (*Sipping her coffee.*)

Theodore. Why?

Mrs. Annerly. You're getting rather too fond of—(*Pointing to the brandy.*) h'm, h'm.

Theodore. (*Bluntly.*) It's false.

Mrs. Annerly. (*With undisturbed complacency.*) I've seen so much of that sort o' thing in my time. (*He makes a movement as if to put down his glass without drinking.*) Still, I must say you've every excuse.

Theodore. Alice—

Mrs. Annerly. What? (*He gulps his brandy, puts the empty glass on the tray, and comes to her.*)

Theodore. (*Standing before her.*) Alice, will you oblige me by refraining from making any allusion to my wife, direct or indirect, in the future? It annoys me.

Mrs. Annerly. Everything annoys you this afternoon.

Theodore. You were at it last night at the Carlton. And today, during lunch—

Mrs. Annerly. (*In an injured tone.*) It was you who told me that that little Jew chap had met her careering about Italy with young what's-his-name. (*He sits in the arm-chair at the further end of the settee, and leans his head on his hand.*) Ah, but that was in your loving days, when you used to confide in me.

Theodore. I was in a rage and said a great deal more than I thought.

Mrs. Annerly. If you did, you needn't jump on me for trying to feel interested in you and your affairs.

Theodore. (*Facing her.*) At any rate, understand me clearly, Alice — and drop the subject. (*Shortly.*) Mrs. Blundell and I are separated; she's gone one way, I another. There were faults on both sides, as usual, but I was mainly to blame. There's the thing in a nut-shell.

Mrs. Annerly. This isn't in the least your old story.

Theodore. Never mind my old story. (*Extending a fore-finger.*) *You* forget the old story, my girl, if you wish our acquaintance to continue—d'ye hear?

Mrs. Annerly. (*Shaking herself.*) You're a nasty savage.

Theodore. As for that interfering cad, Löwenstein, it unfortunately happens that one of Mrs. Blundell's characteristics is a habit of disregarding *les*

convenances—a habit which I didn't go the right way to check. It's probable that, before she's done, she won't leave herself with as much reputation as 'ud cover a sixpence. She's impulsive, reckless, a fool—but she's no worse. (*Eyeing the stump of his cigar fiercely.*) My wife's no worse. So hands off, if you please, in my presence. Whatever reports are circulated to her discredit, the man who speaks against her in my hearing is kicked for his pains; and the woman who does so, if she's under my roof, gets taken by the shoulders and shown the mat. (*Looking at her.*) *Comprenez?*

Mrs. Annerly. (*Pouting.*) I should be a juggins if I didn't. *Parfaitement*—in my very best French.

Theodore. (*Rising and walking about.*) That's settled, then.

Mrs. Annerly. (*After a pause, rising and depositing her cup upon the table on the left—thoughtfully.*) Boy dear—

Theodore. (*At the back.*) Hey?

Mrs. Annerly. It was regular cat-and-dog between you two at the end, wasn't it?

Theodore. (*Breaking out again.*) It's no concern of yours whether it was or not. I've asked you—

Mrs. Annerly. (*Crossing to the right, with a shrug.*) Oh—!

Theodore. Yes, it *was*. (*Half sitting upon the back of the settee on the left.*) I—I tired of her.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Philosophically.*) Ah, men *do* tire.

Theodore. And she of me. We'd been married close upon fourteen years.

Mrs. Annerly. Oh, well, come; that's a long while.

Theodore. (*As much to himself as to her.*) Our wedding day's on the thirtieth of this month. (*Hitting the back of the settee softly with his fist.*) We'd reached a time in our lives when—when we were in mid-Channel—

Mrs. Annerly. Mid-Channel?

Theodore. (*Rising.*) Oh, you don't know anything about that.

(*There is a further silence. She sits upon the settee on the right, watching him as he moves about the room again.*)

Mrs. Annerly. Here! (*Beckoning him with a motion of her head.*) Here! (*He goes to her. She looks*

up into his face.) Why don't you marry *me*, Theo?

Theodore. (*Staring at her.*) Marry—you?

Mrs. Annerly. You'll find me awfully easy to get on with.

Theodore. (*Turning from her quietly.*) Oh—!

Mrs. Annerly. Wait; you might listen, anyhow. (*He turns to her.*) I *am*—awfully easy to get on with. And I'd be as strict as—as strict as a nun. Honest injun! I treated Annerly pretty badly, but that's ancient history. I was only seventeen when I married Frank—too inexperienced for words. I've learnt a lot since.

Theodore. (*Bitterly.*) Ha!

Mrs. Annerly. Now, don't be satirical. (*Inviting him to sit by her side.*) Theo— (*He sits beside her.*) I say—bar chaff—I wish you *would.*

Theodore. (*Absently.*) What?

Mrs. Annerly. Marry me. Really I do. (*A note of wistfulness in her voice.*) I really do want to re-establish myself. My life, these past few years, has been frightfully unsatisfactory.

Theodore. (*Touching her dress, sympathetically.*) Ah!

Mrs. Annerly. And I'm a lady, remember—giddy as I may have been. Put me in any society and I'm presentable, as far as manners go. I'd soon right myself, with your assistance. (*Slipping her arm through his.*) I suppose, under the circumstances, you couldn't divorce *her*, could you?

Theodore. What d'ye mean?

Mrs. Annerly. Your wife—over that Italian business.

Theodore. (*Jumping up.*) Damn!

Mrs. Annerly. Oh, I beg your pardon; it slipped out. (*He walks away to the table at the back and begins to mix himself a whiskey-and-soda.*) I'm dreadfully grieved; gospel, I am. (*Rising.*) Don't —don't, boy dear. Do leave that stuff alone. (*He puts down the decanter and comes to the settee on the left.*) I can't do more than apologise.

Theodore. Tsch! (*Sitting.*) Hold your tongue.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Sitting beside him.*) No, but you could let *her* go for *you*, though; *that* could be fixed up. I'd even consent to be dragged into the case myself, if it would help matters forward; and

goodness knows I've no ambition to appear in the Divorce Court again,—I hate the hole. (*Coaxingly.*) You *will* consider it, won't you?

. . . . . .

Theodore. (*With a set jaw.*) I'm glad you've brought matters to a head, Ally. I've something to propose to you.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Pulling on a glove.*) I've no desire to hear it.

Theodore. Something that's been on my mind for—oh, a month or more.

Mrs. Annerly. You can keep it to yourself. I'm not accustomed to being jeered at.

Theodore. (*Slowly walking over to the right.*) I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings—

Mrs. Annerly. It's the first time I've ever made advances to a man, and I assure you it'll be the last.

Theodore. Ally—

Mrs. Annerly. (*Moving towards the double-door.*) Cole will get me a taxi.

Theodore. (*Authoritatively.*) Come here; come here; come here.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Halting behind the settee on the left, with a twist of her body.*) I shall not.

Theodore. (*Snapping his finger and thumb.*) Ally— (*She approaches him with assumed reluctance.*) Ally— (*Deliberately.*) what'll you take—

Mrs. Annerly. (*Elevating her brows.*) Take?

Theodore. To put an end to this.

Mrs. Annerly. An end!

Theodore. To end your boredom—and mine; terminate our —friendship.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Uncomfortably.*) Oh, you—you needn't cut up as rough as all this.

Theodore. Ah, no, no, no; I'm not angry. I'm in earnest, though. Come! what'll satisfy you? (*She curls her lip fretfully.*) A man of my years deserves to pay heavily at this game. What'll make you easy and comfortable for a bit? I'll be liberal with you, my dear, and— (*Offering his hand.*) shake hands— (*She turns her shoulder to him.*) shake hands— (*She gives him her hand sulkily.*) and I—I'll ask you to forgive me—

Mrs. Annerly. (*Withdrawing her hand.*) Oh, for goodness'

sake, don't let's have any more of *that.* (*Contemptuously.*) You elderlies always wind up in the same way.

(*He seats himself at the writing-table and, unlocking a drawer, produces his chequè-book.*)

Theodore. Would a couple of thousand be of any service to you?

Mrs. Annerly. (*Opening her eyes widely.*) A couple of—!

Theodore. I mean it. (*Preparing to write.*)

Mrs. Annerly. (*Breathlessly.*) You don't! (*He writes.*) Why, of course it would. (*Melting completely.*) Oh, but it's too much; it is positively. I *couldn't.* And I've had such a lot out of you already. You *are* generous. (*Behind his chair.*) Fancy my being huffy with you just now! (*Bending over him and arresting his pen.*) Boy, dear—

Theodore. Hey?

Mrs. Annerly. (*In a whisper.*) Make it—three—will you? (*He looks at her over his shoulder with a cynical smile.*) (*She retreats.*) Oh, well! One isn't young and attractive for ever, you know.

(*He finishes writing the cheque and, having locked up his chequebook methodically, rises and comes to her.*)

Theodore. (*Giving her the cheque.*) There you are.

Mrs. Annerly. (*Examining it.*) You—you've split the difference! You *are* kind. I didn't expect it in the least. (*Folding the cheque neatly and finding a place for it in her bosom.*) I *am* ashamed of myself for hinting so broadly. Thanks, a hundred times. (*Blinking at him.*) Shan't I miss you!

Having subjected this scene to the test of copying it out —therefore necessarily weighing every word of it—I do not hesitate to call it masterly in conception, flawless in rhythm* and diction. Mrs. Annerly (who makes no other appearance in the play) is mercilessly and yet delicately dissected for us in every word she utters. Her dialect is right to the smallest accent. Let anyone who is curious in

*The rhythm I have in mind is that of movement, of mental process, not of phrasing.

these matters compare her diction with that of Hilda Gunning in *Letty*—a woman of the same type, but several degrees coarser in fibre—and he will realise that Sir Arthur Pinero, far from being devoid of linguistic sense, is capable of the subtlest discriminations. The situation as a whole has many analogues, if no precise parallel, in Restoration Comedy; but where shall we find a scene in which so much invention, knowledge and technical skill goes to the shaping and placing of every sentence?—in which (to put it briefly) there is so high a pressure of thought to the square inch?

Another play, *The "Mind-the-Paint" Girl,* ranks among Sir Arthur's best works. It was a first-night failure because a rowdy gang had got it into their heads that it was a lampoon upon the heroines of musical comedy. It was the very reverse; Lily Paradell is one of the most charming figures Sir Arthur ever drew, no unworthy sister to Rose Trelawny. Nor is the general life of the musical-comedy actress treated with any ungentle hand; rather one suspects a touch of idealisation. Quite the severest passage of satire is the following little dialogue between Miss Gabrielle Kato and her admirer, Sam de Castro:

Gabrielle. If I'm rude, it's owing to my low spirits. I'm so shockingly low-spirited.

De Castro. I know you are, and I make allowanthes for yer. I repeat, all I athk—

Gabrielle. (*Gazing at vacancy.*) Mine's a strange nature. *On* the stage I'm liveliness itself—!

De Castro. A perfect little lump o' talent! I've been tellin' Carleton tho—perthuadin' him to introduthe an extra thong for you in Act Two.

Gabrielle. You have?

De Castro. Yeth.

Gabrielle. Did he promise to think it over?

De Castro. Hith exthact wordth!

Gabrielle. (*With a hollow laugh.*) Ha, ha, ha! As I was remarking, I'm a mass of inconsistency. On the stage the embodiment of elfish fun—

De Castro. That wath in the *Mail.*

Gabrielle. (*Nodding.*) In the *Mail. Off* the stage, I'm a sufferer from what's called the artistic temperature—no, temperament—

De Castro. (*Uncomfortably, patting her shoulder.*) Po' little girl; po' little girl!

Gabrielle. (*Her melancholy increasing.*) Sometimes I've an idea that if I had a motor-car of my *own* I should feel easier and happier.

De Castro. (*With a change of tone.*) What d'ye mean—motor-car of yer own? Mineth alwayth at your dith-pothal, ithn't it?

Gabrielle. (*Shaking her head.*) That's not the same thing. Whenever I have yours out, I'm weighed down by a sense of borrowing.

De Castro. Well, if I gave you a new car, you'd be weighed down by the thenthe of my havin' paid for it.

Gabrielle. At first I should, but not for long. Seeing my family crest on the door-panels, instead of your monogram, 'ud help me to forget you'd had anything to do with it. (*Gloomily.*) Of course, it 'ud only be an experiment. It might cheer me up, or it mightn't.

Perhaps it was the Sam de Castros of the audience who felt their withers wrung by this banter. At all events, the play never recovered from its bad first-night, and has never been revived. None the less is it one of the most brilliant and attractive comedies of our time. The theatrical system is horribly out of joint which allows such a play to go to waste, merely because one particular audience misunderstands it.

I am inclined to place *The "Mind-the-Paint" Girl* beside *The Thunderbolt* and *Mid-Channel* in the first class of Sir Arthur's works. *The Big Drum,* on the other hand, does not stand very high in the second class. Its satire on social climbers and self-advertisers is just and to the point, and its third act presents one of the author's superb situations. But it suffers from two drawbacks—a heroine who, being the widow of a Frenchman, feels herself bound to speak very nearly as much French as English, and a last act which seeks in vain to escape anti-climax by having recourse to psychological paradox of the most dubious description. Even this play, however, was far from deserving the scorn with which it was treated by the anti-Pinero-ite critics.

When I began to prepare this lecture, I had no intention

of devoting so large a part of it to Sir Arthur Pinero. But as I re-read his plays, with renewed and increased admiration, I felt more and more strongly that I must do what in me lay to redress a very grave critical injustice which has been done to a man to whom we all owe so much. I have admitted that he has intellectual limitations; I have admitted that he sometimes (by no means always) writes in a somewhat stilted style; but how insignificant are these blemishes upon the splendid series of comedies and dramas with which, undiscouraged by the most glacial criticism, he has enriched our literature! Some of his most captious critics are my old and dear friends; were they here just now, I should be very much tempted to "employ the vernacular" in telling them what I think of their treatment of the author of *Mid-Channel*. When history views things in their just proportions, he will stand out as a great master of the essentials of drama. His critics have been guilty of the very human but very uncritical error of letting inessentials blind them to essentials. They have said, in effect, "Here is a man whose tone of voice we don't like; no matter what he says or does, let's heave half a brick at him."

Perhaps you may say, "If Sir Arthur Pinero's best plays are so good as you would have us think, surely they ought not to need this championship. Masterpieces defend themselves, and need no one to fight their battles." I reply that this is not absolutely true of any form of literature, but certainly not of plays in a country where plays are very little read and very seldom revived. If we had a rational system of repertory theatres, there are at least half-a-dozen of Sir Arthur's works that would be constantly in the public eye. As it is, when their first run, be it long or short, is over, they have no chance to rear their heads against critical prejudice. For a play which is unjustly treated at the outset, there is no court of appeal.

We have had, and have, several playwrights of what may be called the Pinero school, who, if time permitted, would be worth some study—such men as Hubert Henry Davies, H. V. Esmond, Alfred Sutro, Horace Annesley Vachell, and,

last and ablest, Somerset Maugham.* These men of the second and third order are far better dramatists than any man of the first order during the dead century between Sheridan and Robertson. That they should today rank as underwoods, not forest trees, shows how the whole scale of things has altered.

Before I go on, in my next lecture, to speak of the intellectual movement that centred in, and radiated from, the Vedrenne Barker management of 1904-1907, I must say a few words of a writer so intensely individual as to elude classification and stand absolutely alone in our dramatic literature—I mean, of course, Sir James Barrie.

I am content to treat him shortly because he raises no critical question. We may differ in our estimates of individual plays. You may think *The Admirable Crichton* better than *Alice-Sit-by-the Fire;* I may hold the contrary opinion. I am even told that it is possible to dislike *Quality Street* and to like *Mary Rose.* But no rational being doubts that Sir James is a humorist of original and delightful genius who happens to have an extraordinary knack of expressing himself in dramatic form, and even adapting his work to the stern exigencies of the modern realistic technique. We who believe in the advantages of that technique owe him a special debt of gratitude for having proved that it puts no trammels even on what may be called the vagaries of genius. Just as Ibsen had shown it responsive to the demands of the loftiest imagination, so Barrie has proved it adequate to the requirements of the subtlest and most delicate fantasy. One can hardly imagine two plays more different in spirit and content than (for example) *Mid-Channel* and *What Every Woman Knows;* yet each fulfils with perfect ease the strict requirements of the realistic stage. Would either Sir Arthur Pinero or Sir James Barrie have produced a greater work of art if he had made his people talk in blank-verse; if he had changed his scene every ten minutes; if he had let his characters narrate their antecedents in soliloquies and ex-

*In wit, *The Circle* holds its own with any Restoration comedy—and it has humour to boot.

plain their motives in asides; if he had constantly strained after wit, instead of letting his dialogue flow naturally from the action and reaction of situation upon character? I hope I need not answer those questions. I do not see how anyone who has given serious thought to the matter can doubt that dramatic art has gained enormously in abandoning the crude labor-saving appliances of our ancestors, or that it needs far greater talent to write natural and lively, than to write artificially brilliant, dialogue.

As an instance of dialogue which is strictly true to character, yet is as bright as if every second speech were an epigram, let us take a page or two from the first act of *What Every Woman Knows*. You remember the Wylie family; the father, Alick, the two sons, David and James, and the daughter, Maggie; you remember how the spinsterhood of Maggie is weighing upon the family mind, she having decided that she is devoid of the "charrum" which is the sole passport to matrimony; and you remember how the family sits up to catch a burglar who has been seen stealing from their premises at unlawful hours. The burglar proves to be John Shand, a railway porter, who crowns his misdemeanour by seating himself in the "fine chair" which is regarded in the family as a thing of beauty, not of vulgar utility. As soon as he is recognised, the scene proceeds:

Maggie. I hope you find that chair comfortable, young man.

John. I have no complaint to make against the chair.

Alick. (*Who is really distressed.*) A native of the town. The disgrace to your family. I feel pity for the Shands this night.

John. (*Glowering.*) I'll thank you, Mr. Wylie, not to pity my family.

James. Canny, canny.

Maggie. (*That sense of justice again.*) I think you should let the young man explain. It mayn't be so bad as we thought.

David. Explain away, my billie.

John. Only the uneducated would need an explanation. I'm a student (*With a little passion.*), and I'm desperate for want of books. You have all I want here; no use to you but for display; well, I came here to

study. I come twice weekly. (*Amazement of his hosts.*) . . . Well, is it a case for the police?

James. It is.

Maggie. (*Not so much out of the goodness of her heart as to patronise the Shands.*) It seems to me it's a case for us all to go to our beds and leave the young man to study; but not on that chair. (*And she wheels the chair away from him.*) . . .

David. Are you a poor scholar?

John. On the contrary, I'm a brilliant scholar.

David. It's siller, then?

John. (*Glorified by experiences he has shared with many a brilliant soul.*) My first year at college I lived on a barrel of potatoes, and we had just a sofa-bed between two of us; when the one lay down the other had to get up. Do you think it was hardship? It was sublime. But this year I can't afford it. I'll have to stay on here, collecting the tickets of the illiterate, such as you, when I might be with Romulus and Remus among the stars.

James. (*Summing up.*) Havers.

David. (*In whose head some design is vaguely taking shape.*) Whisht, James. I must say, young lad, I like your spirit. Now tell me, what's your professors' opinion of your future?

John. They think me a young man of extraordinary promise.

David. You have a name here for high moral character.

John. And justly.

David. Are you serious-minded?

John. I never laughed in my life. . . .

David. One more question. Are you promised?

John. To a lady?

David. Yes.

John. I've never given one of them a single word of encouragement. I'm too much occupied thinking about my career.

David. So. (*He reflects, and finally indicates by a jerk of the head that he wishes to talk with his father behind the door.*) . . .

Maggie. I don't know what maggot they have in their heads but sit down, young man, till they come back.

John. My name's Mr. Shand, and till I'm called that I decline to sit down again in this house.

Maggie. Then I'm thinking, young sir, you'll have a weary wait. (*David and Alick return presently.*)

David. (*Suddenly become genial.*) Sit down, Mr. Shand, and pull in your chair. You'll have a thimbleful of something to keep the cold out? (*Briskly.*) Glasses, Maggie. . . . You're not a totaller, I hope?

John. (*Guardedly.*) I'm practically a totaller.

David. So are we. How do you take it? Is there any hot water, Maggie? . . .

(*Maggie goes kitchenwards for the kettle.*)

Alick. Now, David, quick, before she comes back.

David. Mr. Shand, we have an offer to make you.

John. (*Warningly.*) No patronage.

Alick. It's strictly a business affair.

David. Leave it to me, father. It's this—(*But, to his annoyance, Maggie has already returned with the kettle.*) Maggie, don't you see that you're not wanted?

Maggie. (*Sitting down by the fire and resuming her knitting.*) I do, David.

David. I have a proposition to put before Mr. Shand, and women are out of place in business transactions.

(*The needles continue to click.*)

Alick. (*Sighing.*) We'll have to let her bide, David.

David. (*Sternly.*) Woman. (*But even this does not budge her.*) Very well, then, sit there, but don't interfere, mind. Mr. Shand, we're willing, the three of us, to lay out three hundred pounds on your education, if—

John. Take care.

David. (*Slowly, which is not his wont.*) On condition that, five years from now, Maggie Wylie, if still unmarried, can claim to marry you, should such be her wish; the thing to be perfectly open on her side, but you to be strictly tied down.

James. (*Enlightened.*) So, so.

David. (*Resuming his smart manner.*) Now, what have you to say? Decide.

John. (*After a pause.*) I regret to say—

Maggie. It doesn't matter what he regrets to say, because I decide against it. And I think it was very ill-done of you to make any such proposal.

David. (*Without looking at her.*) Quiet, Maggie.

John. (*Looking at her.*) I must say, Miss Maggie, I don't see what reasons *you* can have for being so set against it.

Maggie. If you would grow a beard, Mr. Shand, the reasons wouldn't be quite so obvious.

John. I'll never grow a beard.

Maggie. Then you're done for at the start.
Alick. Come, come.
Maggie. Seeing I have refused the young man—
John. Refused!
David. That's no reason why we shouldn't have his friendly opinion. Your objections, Mr. Shand?
John. Simply, it's a one-sided bargain. I admit I'm no catch at present; but what could a man of my abilities not soar to with three hundred pounds? Something far above what she could aspire to.
Maggie. Oh, indeed.
David. The position is that without the three hundred you can't soar.
John. You have me there. . . .
David. It's a good arrangement for you, Mr. Shand. The chances are you'll never have to go on with it, for in all probability she'll marry soon.
James. She's tremendous run after.
John. Even if that's true, it's just keeping me in reserve in case she misses doing better.
David. (*Relieved.*) That's the situation in a nutshell.
John. Another thing. Supposing I was to get fond of her?
Alick. (*Wistfully.*) It's very likely.
John. Yes; and then suppose she was to give me the go-by?
David. You have to risk that.
John. Or take it the other way. Supposing as I got to know her I *could not* endure her?
David. (*Suavely.*) You have both to take risks.
James. (*Less suavely.*) What you need, John Shand, is a clout on the head.
John. Three hundred pounds is no great sum.
David. You can take it or leave it.
Alick. No great sum for a student studying for the ministry!
John. Do you think that with that amount of money I would stop short at being a minister?
David. That's how I like to hear you speak. A young Scotsman of your ability let loose upon the world with three hundred pounds, what could he not do? It's almost appalling to think of; especially if he went among the English.
John. What do you think, Miss Maggie?
Maggie. (*Who is knitting.*) I have no thoughts on the subject, either way. . . .
David. Well, Mr. Shand?
John. I'm willing if she's willing.

David. Maggie?
Maggie. There can be no "if" about it. It must be an offer. . . .
John. (*Reluctantly.*) Miss Maggie, will you?
Maggie. (*Doggedly.*) Is it an offer?
John. (*Dourly.*) Yes.
Maggie. (*Rising.*) Before I answer I want first to give you a chance of drawing back.
David. Maggie.
Maggie. (*Bravely.*) When they said that I have been run after, they were misleading you. I'm without charm; nobody has ever been after me.
John. Oho!
Alick. They will be yet.
John. (*The innocent.*) It shows at least that you haven't been after them.
(*His hosts exchange a self-conscious glance.*)
Maggie. One thing more; David said I'm twenty-five; I'm twenty-six.
John. Aha!
Maggie. Now be practical. Do you withdraw from the bargain, or do you not?
John. (*On reflection.*) It's a bargain.
Maggie. Then so be it.
David. (*Hurriedly.*) And that's settled. Did you say you would take it hot, Mr. Shand?
John. I think I'll take it neat.

(*The others decide to take it hot, and there is some careful business here with the toddy-ladles.*)

For my part, I would infinitely rather have written this scene than the most brilliantly disgusting passage of Restoration Comedy that ever the Stage Society or the Phœnix presented to the ravished ears of ladies and gentlemen avid of co-education in nastiness.

In conclusion let me say that Sir James Barrie, though certainly the most original genius among the writers treated of in this lecture and its predecessor, is not misplaced in his present company. In my next lecture I shall have to deal with what may roughly be called the intellectual movement, in which Sir James can scarcely be said to have participated. His criticism of life is often subtle and penetrating, but it is the criticism of humorous, not of philosophic, insight.

In one or two of his plays he seems to be feeling around for a philosophy, but he never quite finds it. This is true, in my judgment, of *The Admirable Crichton;* it is certainly true of *Mary Rose.* His strength lies in observation and fantasy, not in thought; and it is with the thinkers that we have next to deal.

XIII

There have been three clearly-marked stages in the rehabilitation of British drama which we are engaged in tracing; and each stage is associated with the name of a remarkable man. The first was the Robertson stage, short but indispensable; the second the Pinero stage; the third the Shaw stage. The first two movements came from within the theatre itself. Robertson and Pinero were actors before they were authors; so were two others of the leading lights of the Pinero period, R. C. Carton and H. V. Esmond. But the third movement proceeded from without. It was an intellectual movement and a movement of intellectuals. Its leaders, with one exception, were men of letters before they became men of the theatre. Economically, it was at first, and has continued to be in some measure, an endowed movement. The endowments were inconsiderable; in some cases they consisted rather in unpaid or underpaid work than in actual cash. But if the Shaw drama had been forced from the first to pay its way, as were the Robertson drama and the Pinero drama, it would long ago have died of starvation.

Mr. J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre, founded in 1891, on the model of the French Théâtre Libre, dealt more in foreign than in English drama, producing, for instance, Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *Wild Duck*. But in 1892 it secured for Mr. Bernard Shaw his first hearing on the stage, when it produced *Widowers' Houses*. Two years later, *Arms and the Man* was produced at the Avenue Theatre. This was ostensibly an ordinary theatrical venture; but I think I am letting no cat out of the bag in stating that the enterprise was backed, at considerable loss, by Miss Horniman, a lady whose generous and judicious employment of her wealth has done wonders for the drama. Mr. Shaw himself relates how the business manager at the Avenue pulled a very long face over a play by Dr. Todhunter which opened Miss Horni-

man's season, saying, "Ah, that was a sad failure: we lost a thousand pounds by it." "And what about *Arms and the Man?*" someone asked; upon which he instantly cheered up and replied with alacrity, "Oh, that was a great success; we lost two thousand pounds by *that*."

Several small side-show theatres were attempted in the 'nineties, without much result. The only enterprise which was destined to make history was the Stage Society, founded in 1899, mainly by Mr. Lee Mathews and Mr. Frederick Whelen. The original intention was simply to give studio performances on Sunday evenings; and the Sunday performance has remained the chief plank of the Society's platform. But it quickly blossomed into a very active and comparatively opulent organisation, which did excellent service in many ways, but particularly in staging several of Mr. Shaw's plays, and in enabling Mr. Granville-Barker to win his spurs as a producer. Of late years, I have not always been in sympathy with the Stage Society. It has rather obviously outlived its uses; for the stones which the builders rejected twenty years ago, and which it retrieved from oblivion, have now become the head stones of the corner. But nothing can cancel the indispensable work that it did during the first five, or even ten, years of the century; and I desire to speak with all respect of the energy and public spirit with which it was conducted.

It was the Stage Society, I repeat, which gave Mr. Granville-Barker his first noteworthy opportunities as a producer and also as an author, for it produced his *Marrying of Ann Leete*. Another side-show known as the New Century Theatre, by producing Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, led the way in that series of revivals of Attic tragedy, whereby Mr. Barker and others did so much to create a new class of serious playgoers. Then, in 1904, the non-commercial drama, in the person of Mr. Barker, joined hands with the commercial drama, in the person of a well-known manager, Mr. J. E. Vedrenne, in that enterprise at the Court Theatre, which was so fruitful of good work, and marked an era in theatrical history, quite

as distinctly as did the Bancroft management at the Prince of Wales's. The Court was not run as a true repertory theatre; the stage accommodation and the finances of the management were alike too limited to permit of anything so ambitious. It was conducted on what may be called the short-run system, artistically preferable to the long-run system, but economically unsound. Each production was announced for a stated term of two, three, or even four weeks, and, however attractive it might prove, was taken off at the end of that period, and replaced by another. It might, of course, be revived later; but the impetus of its first success was lost. In other words, the management renounced large gains in order to give their patrons and their actors variety. Under the true repertory system, no such renunciation would have been necessary; for an attractive production might have been given three or four times a week until it had attained a hundred, two hundred, or even more performances. The great essential of the repertory system is that no play must be presented more than three times in succession, and that at least three plays must be presented every week. This obviously requires a much larger company and much greater scenic resources than the Vedrenne-Barker management could command. It should also be mentioned that they at first confined themselves to afternoon performances, thereby securing the services of actors to whom they could not have afforded to offer what may be called whole-time engagements.

By dint of the most strenuous and devoted labour, the Vedrenne-Barker experiment was successfully carried out for three seasons at the Court. In the course of these three seasons eleven plays by Bernard Shaw were presented, five or six of them for the first time. In all seven hundred and one Shaw performances were given as against two hundred and eighty-seven of plays by other authors. But though the Court was thus pre-eminently the Shaw theatre, the opportunities offered to other dramatists were scarcely less important. Mr. Galsworthy made his first bow as a dramatist with that masterly play, *The Silver Box*. The narrow but by no means

negligible talent of the late St. John Hankin found scope for development. Mr. John Masefield made his first essay in drama. And, most noteworthy event of all, Granville-Barker himself was enabled for the first time to give the full measure of his talent in *The Voysey Inheritance*. The experiment was afterwards repeated on a larger scale at the Savoy Theatre, but without equal success; and a somewhat similar experiment, known as the Charles Frohman Repertory Theatre, failed completely at the Duke of York's, bnt not till it had given us Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice* and Mr. Barker's *Madras House*. Then came the war, and theatrical idealism was instantly paralysed. The future of the English drama in great measure depends upon the question whether, and in what form, it will revive.

This little historical sketch was necessary to show that the final stage of the progress we are studying would have been impossible but for idealistic effort. Some people actually put down money, others gave work and thought either for nothing or for a mere living wage, renouncing all hope of the great prizes of theatrical speculation. We shall see in my next lecture that the same principle,—the principle of enthusiastic labour and sacrifice—spreading to the provinces and to Ireland, has created a provincial and an Irish dramatic literature. In all probability, progress would have stopped dead at what I have called the Pinero stage had the drama been left to do its best under purely commercial conditions. As you know, I think very highly of the best work produced in the Pinero stage of advance; but it would be foolish to deny that the drama which we owe to the idealistic movement possesses both intellectual and poetic qualities beyond the reach of the Pinero school.

Perhaps the most difficult task that criticism can attempt is a valuation of Mr. Bernard Shaw as a dramatist. Some people simplify the task by denying that he is a dramatist at all, and considering him purely as a merchant of ideas. They regard his plays as mere extensions or illustrations of his prefaces. But this is an altogether too high-handed

method of getting out of the difficulty. Many of his productions are quite good plays, or would be if he did not deliberately subordinate the artist to the humourist, the paradoxist and the preacher. That is to say, their structure is clever, many of their scenes are highly dramatic, and a few strokes of the blue pencil—the elimination of certain wilful whimsicalities, inconsistencies, intrusions of the jester and the doctrinaire—would enable us to treat them quite seriously as works of art. "What you demand," it may be said, "is that Mr. Shaw should blue-pencil his personality!" Yes, exactly—that he should suppress his personality just as Shakespeare does, as Molière does, as Ibsen does, as all great dramatists do. No one can say that these playwrights lack individuality, and no one would wish Mr. Shaw to be less individual than they. The trouble is that he insists on being more individual, on viewing the world from such an intensely personal angle that his characters never seem, for any length of itme, to lead a free and natural life, but are constantly reminding us of the ventriloquist and wire-puller behind the scenes.

I sometimes wonder whether, if I had handled Mr. Shaw with tact and patience at the outset and carried on the collaboration in which, as he himself has narrated, *Widowers' Houses* took its rise, I might have led him into the paths of righteousness. The fact unfortunately was that we never attempted any collaborative discussion. I supplied him with a plot for a Robertsonian comedy (partly stolen, by the way, from an early play of Augier's) and he sat down to write it. He wrote in laborious shorthand which I could not read, and he himself could but slowly decipher; so I was unable to keep any check upon his proceedings. After a month or two he said to me, "I've finished the first act of the comedy, and I've used up all your plot. I want some more to go on with." I told him that my plot was an organic entity which could no more be eked out and supplemented than a few extra arms and legs could be tagged on to a statue already provided with the full complement—and there our collaboration ended, before I had read a line of the

play. The truth was, of course, not that he had used up my plot, but that he had dropped it overboard. All that was retained was the bare idea of a young man refusing to marry tainted money. The scene of the first act, too,—in a hotel garden on the Rhine—belonged to my scheme. I had intended the play to be called *Rhinegold*.

Even if I could have read Mr. Shaw's shorthand, I doubt whether matters would have mended; for as I read the act today, I cannot but admit that a more unpromising first attempt was never made by a writer who was afterwards to do work of any note. Oh, but it is bad, bad! It is bad beyond the badness of those early days. T. W. Robertson, James Albery, H. J. Byron himself never did anything more puerile. The hero, Dr. Harry Trench, is an unspeakable numskull, and he is accompanied by a confidant, Cokane by name, who is as feeble and conventional a caricature as any the contemporary stage could show. Dr. Trench has fallen in love with a young lady, Blanche Sartorius, whom he has met on board a Rhine steamer. Her father, overhearing (as he is intended to overhear) Cokane talking to Trench of his aristocratic relations, agrees to let him marry Blanche, provided he can produce letters from the said relations showing that they will welcome her into the family. Trench, like the congenital idiot he is, asks Cokane to draft for him a letter to his Aunt Maria—otherwise Lady Roxdale—announcing his engagement. Cokane accepts the commission, and sets about it there and then in the hotel garden. Sartorius, the lady's father, coming upon him in the agonies of composition, offers to help him; and the two together write Trench's letter to his aunt. Did you ever hear of such nonsense? It does not even lead to anything; Trench might just as well have written his own letter; the incident exists, apparently, for its own brilliant sake. And that is the whole substance of the act—can you wonder that, when at last I read it, I concluded that my collaborator's genius was totally unfitted for the stage?

The two remaining acts were a different matter. They, doubtless, had good dramatic material in them. Trench is

horrified to find that his prospective father-in-law is the worst slum-landlord in London. He attacks Sartorius on the point, only to learn that his own little income of seven hundred pounds a year is derived from a mortgage on the same rookery. Finally he agrees to stand in with Sartorius in a scheme to rob the ratepayers by making bogus improvements on the property, and so extracting exorbitant compensation when a new thoroughfare is run through the slum. In the third act, for the first time in dramatic history, a blue-book appeared upon the stage. It was a symbolic innovation. It meant that here was a dramatist who did not simply take the views of the man in the street on social problems, but knew something of what he was talking about. The material was handled with little skill; the development was thin and perfunctory; but such faults were only to be expected in the work of a beginner.

What was not to be expected, and what filled me with despair, was the character of Blanche. She was a first sketch for the Ann Whitfield of *Man and Superman*, the temptress à la Schopenhauer, stupefying the reason and enthralling the senses of man, in the interests of a physico-metaphysical Life-Force. To that, of course, there was no particular objection; but Mr. Shaw was not content with making her a minx—he must needs make her an almost insane virago to boot. After she has quarrelled with Trench in the second act, she has the following scene with her maidservant, who is helping her to make up Trench's letters and presents in a parcel:

Blanche comes in, with a jewel-box in her hands. Her expression is that of a strong and determined woman in an intense passion. The maid looks at her with a mixture of abject wounded affection and bodily terror.

Blanche. (*Looking round.*) Where's my father?

Parlormaid. (*Tremulously propitiatory.*) He left word he'd be back directly, miss. I'm sure he won't be long. Here's the paper and string all ready, miss. (*She spreads the paper on the table.*) Can I do the parcel for you, miss?

Blanche. No. Mind your own business. (*She empties the box on the sheet of brown paper. It contains a packet of letters and some jewellery. She plucks a ring from her finger and throws it down on the heap so angrily that it rolls away and falls on the carpet. The maid submissively picks it up and puts it on the table, again sniffing and drying her eyes.*) What are you crying for?

Parlormaid. (*Plaintively.*) You speak so brutal to me, Miss Blanche; and I do love you so. I'm sure no one else would stay and put up with what I have to put up with.

Blanche. Then go. I don't want you. Do you hear? Go.

Parlormaid. (*Piteously, falling on her knees.*) Oh, no, Miss Blanche, don't send me away from you: don't—

Blanche. (*With fierce disgust.*) Agh! I hate the sight of you. (*The maid, wounded to the heart, cries bitterly.*) Hold your tongue. Are those two gentlemen gone?

Parlormaid. (*Weeping.*) Oh, how could you say such a thing to me, Miss Blanche: me that—

Blanche. (*Seizing her by the hair and throat.*) Stop that noise, I tell you, unless you want me to kill you.

Parlormaid. (*Protesting and imploring, but in a carefully subdued voice.*) Let me go, Miss Blanche: you know you'll be sorry: you always are. Remember how dreadfully my head was cut last time.

Blanche. (*Raging.*) Answer me, will you. Have they gone?

Parlormaid. Lickcheese has gone, looking dreadf— (*She breaks off with a stifled cry as Blanche's fingers tighten furiously on her.*)

Blanche. Did I ask you about Lickcheese? You beast: you know who I mean; you're doing it on purpose.

Parlormaid. (*In a gasp.*) They're staying to lunch.

Blanche. (*Looking intently into her face.*) He?

Parlormaid. (*Whispering with a sympathetic nod.*) Yes, miss. (*Blanche slowly releases her and stands upright with clenched fists and set face. The parlormaid, recognising the passing of the crisis of passion, and fearing no further violence, sits discomfitedly on her heels, and tries to arrange her hair and cap, whimpering a little with exhaustion and soreness.*

For such a scene as this there is, I think, no rationa defence. That such termagants exist I am willing to believe though I don't think many of them are at large. But how ever true to nature Blanche's tantrums may be, they ar utterly irrelevant to this play. No doubt the daughter o a slum landlord *may* have a devilish temper, just as sh may have epilepsy or a wooden leg; but there is nothin normal or highly probable in any of these peculiarities whereas the artistic treatment of the theme obviously de manded that Blanche should be a normal girl, without an startling eccentricities. Her ferocity is a mere red-herrin drawn across the logical trail, a disturbing and distressing irrelevance. Shakespeare devoted a whole play to the study of a shrew; that was his theme and a quite legitimate one; but he did not make Juliet or Portia a vixen for the sheer love of the thing. The full significance of this aberration of Mr. Shaw's was only to be revealed later, when we learned that he was merely yielding, on the threshold of his dramatic career, to an obsession from which he was hardly ever to escape. Himself the most even-tempered and self-controlled of men, he has somehow been induced to regard quarrelling, wrangling, jangling, scrapping and squabbling as the most dramatic element in life. Sheer ill-temper is, in the world he portrays, one of the mainsprings of human conduct. It is because he cannot master such mannerisms, such manias, as this, that we have to deny him the rank of a true dramatic artist.

Yet there is no doubt that, among all his other gifts, an extraordinary gift for the stage is included. I pass over his second play, *The Philanderer*. Strong as is my sense of duty, nothing can possibly persuade me to re-read it—or to reveal to you my opinion of it. But when we come to the group of plays which followed it, we find ourselves unquestionably in the presence of a writer who could, if he would, be a great dramatist. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* contains passages of very strong drama. One may even say that it *is* a very strong drama, and might be a classic but for the wholly irrelevant and inessential loathsomeness of some of

its details—notably the whole character of Frank. *Arms and the Man* is a brilliant and most original farce. I do not know that any of Mr. Shaw's plays is likely to hold the stage longer. Its chief weakness is the sheer Gilbertianism of many touches in the part of Sergius Saranoff. Mr. Shaw always falls below himself when he adopts the mechanical method of Gilbert. As for *Candida*, it is beyond all doubt a little masterpiece—something very like a model of construction and development. And though it is full of Mr. Shaw's true individuality, he somehow contrives to keep his purely personal idiosyncrasies—his eccentricities and obsessions—one is tempted to say his Charles the First's Heads—out of it. We find it hard to imagine how Candida comes to be the daughter of the rascally old Burgess; but apart from this high improbability, there is nothing incredible or inacceptable in the play. It shows, too, a vein of real imagination in Mr. Shaw, of which many other evidences exist, but which his impish humour seldom allows to flow freely. How admirable, for instance, is this passage from the great scene between Morell and Marchbanks in the second act:

Morell. I well know that it is in the poet that the holy spirit of man—the god within him—is most godlike. It should make you tremble to think of that—to think that the heavy burthen and great gift of a poet may be laid upon you.

..Marchbanks. (*Unimpressed and remorseless, his boyish crudity of assertion telling sharply against Morell's oratory.*) It does not make me tremble. It is the want of it in others that makes me tremble.

Morell. (*Redoubling his force of style under the stimulus of his genuine feeling and Eugene's obduracy.*) Then help to kindle it in them—in me—not to extinguish it. In the future—when you are as happy as I am—I will be your true brother in the faith. I will help you to believe that God has given us a world that nothing but our own folly keeps from being a paradise. I will help you to believe that every stroke of your work is sowing happiness for the great harvest that all—even the humblest—shall one day reap.

And last, but trust me, not least, I will help you to believe that your wife loves you and is happy in her home. We need such help, Marchbanks; we need it greatly and always. There are so many things to make us doubt, if once we let our understanding be troubled. Even at home, we sit as if in camp, encompassed by a hostile army of doubts. Will you play the traitor and let them in on me?

Marchbanks. (*Looking round him.*) Is it like this for her here always? A woman, with a great soul, craving for reality, truth, freedom; and being fed on metaphors, sermons, stale perorations, mere rhetoric. Do you think a woman's soul can live on your talent for preaching?

Morell. (*Stung.*) Marchbanks, you make it hard for me to control myself. My talent is like yours insofar as it has any real worth at all. It is the gift of finding words for divine truth.

Marchbanks. (*Impetuously.*) It's the gift of the gab, nothing more and nothing less. What has your knack of fine talking to do with the truth, any more than playing the organ has? I've never been in your church; but I've been to your political meetings; and I've seen you do what's called rousing the meeting to enthusiasm: that is, you excited them until they behaved exactly as if they were drunk. And their wives looked on and saw what fools they were. Oh, it's an old story; you'll find it in the Bible. I imagine King David, in his fits of enthusiasm, was very like you. (*Stabbing him with the words.*) "But his wife despised him in her heart."

Candida is beyond doubt the nearest thing to a pure work of art that Mr. Shaw has ever achieved. If he could have gone further on the same track—developing the artist in himself, and keeping in check the sophist and the mountebank—he would have been one of the greatest of British dramatists. Note, too, that he would have had far more influence—would be a far greater force in the world. People would have taken his message seriously, not merely listened, laughed, and gone on their way.

In *You Never Can Tell*, he breaks out, not so much into farce, as into extravaganza; but what delightful, what brilliant extravaganza it is! The character of William, the benignant, emollient waiter, is a humorous creation of the first order, which may be remembered when far more pretentious Shaw-philosophers are forgotten. Here, however, his obsessions thrust themselves once more to the front—notably his love of sheer ill-temper as a dramatic motive-force. The last act, indeed, degenerates into a preposterous and long-drawn wrangle. Here, too (as, indeed, in *Arms and the Man*), we come upon another of his manias—his predilection for love, or at any rate for violent love-making, at first sight. In an extravaganza it does not matter; but it rather takes our breath away when, in a comparatively serious comedy like *John Bull's Other Island*, the stolid Broadbent, meeting Nora Reilly for the first time, and in the dark, begins to make love to her in exactly one minute, and, in two minutes and a half by the watch, says, "My intentions are perfectly honourable . . . will you be my wife?"

Two plays of this middle period are *The Devil's Disciple* and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. They are humorous melodramas, each written with a view to an individual performer—the one for William Terriss, the other for Ellen Terry. Lady Cicely Waynflete, in the latter play, may be called a feminine counterpart of William in *You Never Can Tell*—a woman with a genius for believing the best and making the best of things, who can tame High Court Judges, fanatical Dervishes and pirates of the Spanish Main, by dint of instinctive fearlessness and inborn benevolence. She is a humorous creation, but there is truth and even profundity in the humour.

Between these two plays, in order of composition, stands *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, a production which shows how much English literature has lost through Mr. Shaw's inability to place any reasonable restraint upon the mountebank in his composition. The piece is full of intellectual and dramatic power. If Mr. Shaw could have been persuaded to enter into serious rivalry with Shakespeare, he might have pro-

duced something, wholly different in style, of course, from *Antony and Cleopatra,* but not unworthy to be named beside it. As it was, he put his tongue in his cheek and gave us perhaps the most hopeless nondescript in literature—a thing far too serious to be called an extravaganza, and far too nonsensical to be called a serious play. For my part, well as I know Mr. Shaw, I cannot conceive how he could find it in his heart to do it—what pleasure he took in guying his own genius.

It is unfortunately impossible to give extracts long enough to illustrate its imaginative power, but only too easy to show Mr. Shaw spitting in the face, as it were, of his own imagination. In the beautifully-conceived scene in which Cæsar, straying from his camp, comes upon the girl-queen nestling between the arms of her favourite Sphinx, this is the way in which he conveys to her the fact that he is not a harmless old gentleman of her own people, but one of the dreaded invaders:

Cæsar. Are you afraid of the Romans?

Cleopatra. (*Very seriously.*) Oh, they would eat us if they caught us. They are barbarians. Their chief is called Julius Cæsar. His father was a tiger and his mother a burning mountain; and his nose is like an elephant's trunk. (*Cæsar involuntarily rubs his nose.*) They all have long noses, and ivory tusks, and little tails, and seven arms with a hundred arrows in each; and they live on human flesh.

Cæsar. Would you like me to show you a real Roman?

Cleopatra. You are frightening me. . . .

Cæsar. Cleopatra, can you see my face well?

Cleopatra. Yes. It is so white in the moonlight.

Cæsar. . . . Do you notice that I have a rather long nose?

Cleopatra. (*Recoiling, paralysed by a terrible suspicion.*) Oh!

Cæsar. It is a Roman nose, Cleopatra.

Need I say that I am not quarrelling with Mr. Shaw for giving Cæsar a sense of humour, and developing the comic element in the situation? It is one thing to show that life had its humorous side even in the days when the Pyramids

were only middle-aged, and quite another thing to get a cheap laugh by dragging in a modern English locution. It would have been just as clever to make Cæsar enter on a donkey, with a green umbrella over his head.

But the character with which Mr. Shaw deliberately and systematically defaces his picture is Cæsar's secretary, Britannus, the embodiment of British narrowmindedness, who goes about being shocked, and saying, "Cæsar, this is not proper. I say it's a scandal." When Cleopatra says to him, "Is it true that when Cæsar caught you on that island, you were painted all over blue?" he replies, "Blue is the colour worn by all Britons of good standing. In war we stain our bodies blue; so that, though our enemies may strip us of our clothes and our lives, they cannot strip us of our respectability." Here, in somewhat compressed form, is a passage from the third act:

Britannus. (*Triumphantly.*) Our brave Rhodian mariners have captured a treasure. There! (*He throws a bag down at Cæsar's feet.*) Our enemies are delivered into our hands.

Cæsar. In that bag?

Britannus. Wait till you hear, Cæsar. This bag contains all the letters which have passed between Pompey's party and the army of occupation here.

Cæsar. Well?

Britannus. (*Impatient of Cæsar's slowness to grasp the situation.*) Well, we shall now know who your foes are. The name of every man who has plotted against you since you crossed the Rubicon may be in those papers, for all we know.

Cæsar. Put them in the fire.

Britannus. Put them—!!! (*He gasps.*)

Cæsar. In the fire. Would you have me waste the next three years of my life in proscribing and condemning men . . . ?

Britannus. But your honour—the honour of Rome—

Cæsar. I do not make human sacrifices to my honour, as your Druids do. . . .

Britannus. Cæsar, this is mere eccentricity. Are traitors to be allowed to go free for the sake of a paradox? . . . (*With genuine feeling.*) O my great

master, if I could but persuade you to regard life seriously, as men do in my country!

Cæsar. Do they truly do so, Britannus?

Britannus. Have you not been there? Have you not seen them? What Briton speaks as you do in your moments of levity? What Briton neglects to attends the services of the sacred grove? What Briton wears clothes of many colours, as you do, instead of plain blue, as all solid, well-esteemed men should? These are moral questions with us.

Cæsar. Well, well, my friend; some day I shall settle down and have a blue toga, perhaps. Meanwhile, I must get on as best I can in my flippant Roman way. (*Apollodorus comes past the light-house.*) What now?

Britannus. What is this? Who are you? How did you come here? . . .

Apollodorus. Hail, great Cæsar! I am Apollodorus the Sicilian, an artist.

Britannus. An artist! Why have they admitted this vagabond?

Cæsar. Peace, man. Apollodorus is a famous patrician amateur.

Britannus. (*Disconcerted.*) I crave the gentleman's pardon. I understood him to say that he was professional.

I don't know whether you find this amusing. I daresay Mr. Shaw thinks that when I say it depresses me, I am playing the part of Britannus, not to say Caledonius, to his Cæsar, and that his is the *beau rôle*, in his Olympian superiority to merely æsthetic or rationalistic considerations. As a matter of fact, no one enjoys his humour more when it is in place, or even when, though out of place, it is genuine and unforced. But it seems to me that the Britannus brand of humour is exactly on a level with that of H. J. Byron when he made Perkin Middlewick ask his son whether Vesuvius was "a-fizzin' " and mistake Pompeii and Herculaneum for unfortunate Italian warehousemen.

From *Man and Superman* onwards—that is to say, from the beginning of the new century—Mr. Shaw tended more and more to drop all pretence at dramatic structure, to re-

nounce everything resembling story or situation, and to make his plays consist of what may be called more or less emotionalised discussions. Two of them, indeed, *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *Fanny's First Play*, still retained some traces of the orthodox comedy form; but they were exceptions. *The Doctor's Dilemma*, with the heroic figure of Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonnington, seems to me one of his happiest efforts.

Of the pure discussion-plays *John Bull's Other Island* is the first and in my eyes the most delightful. After re-reading it the other day, I fell a-wondering why it gave me more pleasure than other discussion-plays which are quite as brilliant and even more profound; and I came to the conclusion that it was because the character of Broadbent was so thoroughly good-tempered, so unargumentative, unquarrelsome, uncantankerous. His first impulse is always to agree with people. It is true that as a rule he hopelessly misunderstands them and agrees with something totally different from what they have said; but this is, after all, an amiable weakness, and affords us an immense relief after the ill-tempered wrangling which fills with its discordant echoes so many scenes of Mr. Shaw's theatre. We get tired, after a while, of an intellectual Donnybrook Fair. It is a curious paradox that we should turn to *John Bull's Other Island* to escape from it.

In *Major Barbara*, notwithstanding the "First Aid for Critics" which Mr. Shaw kindly supplies in his preface, I confess that the main line of doctrine entirely eludes me. I cannot help thinking that there are two main lines, which eventually cross each other, so that the trains of thought which run on them collide, to their mutual destruction. We have on the one hand Mr. Shaw's favourite idea (in which I heartily concur) that poverty is the greatest evil in the world, and its extirpation our first duty. Following Samuel Butler, Mr. Shaw prefers to call it a crime, and I am not disposed to quarrel about words. On that score, then, he has me with him; but when he proceeds to lay down the Nietzschean doctrine of the Superman, and preach the gospel

of high explosives, I cannot harmonise the two ideas. He might conceivably argue that only in a world controlled by an irresistible caste of Supermen could poverty be eradicated; but as a matter of fact, he makes no such suggestion. Rather it seems that his Supermen are going to apply their stupendous instruments of havoc to purposes of mutual obliteration. No one can think or expound his thought more lucidly than Mr. Shaw, when he sets himself to do so; but in the rapture of dramatic composition, in the dust and heat of Donnybrook Fair, he often, I think, loses the thread of his argument, and lets himself go in orgies of fine confused cerebration. But of the eloquence with which he writes it is hard to speak too highly. I must try to make room for one little specimen. When Major Barbara, disillusioned of the Salvation Army on finding it ready to accept pecuniary aid from Bodgers's whiskey and Undershaft's nitroglycerine, declares that "the rock she thought eternal has reeled and crumbled under her," Andrew Undershaft, her father, thus replies to her:

> Come, come, my daughter, don't make too much of your little tinpot tragedy. What do we do here when we spend years of work and thought and thousands of pounds of solid cash on a new gun or an aërial battleship, that turns out just a hair's-breadth wrong after all? Scrap it. Scrap it without wasting another hour or another pound on it. Well, you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesn't fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam-engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. What's the result? In machinery it does very well; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it nearer bankruptcy every year. Don't persist in that folly. If your religion broke down yesterday, get a newer and a better one tomorrow.

To a man who can write like this we can forgive much. The pity is that we should have to forgive him anything.

As time went on, in *Getting Married*, *Misalliance* and *Heartbreak House*, it amused Mr. Shaw to pour out his

discussions in one gush, not only without any structure, but without any breathing-space. It also amused him to pretend that he was thereby returning to the methods of the Greeks. This of course was only his fun; for nobody knew better than he that Greek tragedies were divided into acts by the choruses, and that many of them were superb examples of that very architecture which he had abjured. Perhaps he was a little more serious in giving us to understand that his new system of non-stop intellectual shillelagh-whirling involved a novel refinement and perfection of technique. If he thought so he was strangely mistaken. It was like arguing that the Creator showed greater technical skill in inventing the jelly-fish than in building the race-horse.

In taking leave of Mr. Shaw, then, how are we to sum him up? And how relate him to our general argument? There can be no doubt, I take it, that his is the most powerful intellect at present expressing itself in dramatic form, not only in England, but in the world. But is that to say that he is the greatest dramatist? No; it is only to say that he might have been the greatest dramatist of his time had he chosen to discipline his idiosyncrasies, and subdue the sophist and the jack-pudding to the thinker and the artist. I am inclined to believe that he had not much innate dramatic instinct. He will sacrifice lightheartedly, for the sake of a momentary effect, that logic of character and situation which the born dramatist holds sacred—the categorical imperative of his art. But Ibsen opened his eyes to the possibilities of drama, and in the course of a couple of years, with the most astonishing cleverness, he mastered the rudiments, so to speak, of dramatic form, as Ibsen had developed it. But being a born meliorist and wit instead of a born dramatist, he thought more of the utterance of ideas and the indulgence of whim than of dramatic consistencies and sanities. He mastered the modern form only to break it up and make hay of it. The result is that, instead of acclaiming him as the greatest of living dramatists, we have, as before mentioned, to reckon with serious critics who deny that he is a dramatist at all. He has created

many delectable characters, and written many brilliant pages of discussion and declamation, of fantasy and of farce. But, with the possible exception of *Candida*, his plays are all curate's eggs—there is none that is good all through. The same, no doubt, may be said of Shakespeare, but not quite in the same sense.

It is no part of my present business to criticise him as a thinker, yet I should do him and myself injustice if I appeared to imagine that in passing a qualified verdict upon his merits as a dramatist I had adequately evaluated him. Taking his prefaces with his plays, I think we are bound to acknowledge that he is one of the great voices of our time. He is not exactly an original thinker—not one who has enlarged the boundaries of the human mind. He has himself confessed that he is a man of many discipleships. "Meyerbeer," he says, "seemed prodigiously original to the Parisians when he first burst on them. Today, he is only the crow who followed Beethoven's plough. I am a crow who have [?has] followed many ploughs."* But if he has not gone "voyaging through strange seas of thought alone," he has often worked up the best thought-stuff of the contemporary world with incomparable brilliancy, clarity and cogency. There are many and many passages in his works which, I confess, awaken in me a sort of passion of discipleship—or rather of would-be discipleship. "This man," one feels, "sees more clearly than anyone else what the sick world needs. What a joy to follow him if he would but lead!" But though there is abundance of light, there is no leading in him. Even his light is too often obscured by wilfulness, prejudice, paradox, and that vice which the Germans call *Besserwissen*. It used to be said in William the Second's days of glory, "Gott weiss Alles, aber der Kaiser weiss Alles besser"—"God knows everything, but the Kaiser knows everything better." The same may be said of Mr. Shaw. He is never happy unless he is seeing through a millstone, and seeing the opposite of what anyone else sees. He takes as much trouble to alienate disciples as others to

*Three Plays for Puritans, p. xxxvi.

conciliate them. Dryden could have hit off his character in twenty antithetic couplets, or Browning in five hundred lines of gritty blank-verse. Being neither Dryden nor Browning, I must be content to sum him up as the most brilliant, admirable, lovable, tantalising and exasperating character I have ever known.

Let us now turn back to the days of the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre, and specifically to the afternoon of November 7, 1905. I should not be surprised if this came to be regarded as a noteworthy date in the history of the modern drama. At all events it is a red-letter day in my own experience; for on that afternoon I realised (utterly against all expectation or hope) that I could actually understand and enjoy a play by Mr. Granville-Barker. I had known Mr. Barker for several years, and he had done me the honour of submitting to me in manuscript three or four of his youthful efforts. I saw in them a queer sort of originality, but I laboured under the disadvantage of being wholly unable to make head or tail of them. At last, tired of writing plays which were Hebrew to me, he declared he would write one down to my intelligence; and the result was *The Marrying of Ann Leete*. He succeeded in a sense: it was written in a language not wholly unfamiliar to me; but the characters depicted, and the reasons for their sayings and doings, remained utterly enigmatic. Produced by the Stage Society, the play was highly praised in many quarters. It has been published and may be known to some of you. If you like it, your state is the more gracious, and I am the more obtuse; but candour compels me to own that, after repeated attempts, I have not yet acquired a taste for it. Being a man of the most long-suffering temper, Mr. Barker more than once asked me whether I would like to read his next play, which lay for a year or two in manuscript before it was produced. I always answered, "Where is the use? I certainly shouldn't understand it, and should merely act as a wet blanket to you." Therefore, when the curtain went up on *The Voysey*

Inheritance that November afternoon, I had not the least idea what was in store for me.

Imagine my delight, then, when I found myself from the first interested and absorbed; when I found that I understood almost every word, one or two supersubtleties excepted; and when, at the end, I realised that here was a great play, a play conceived and composed with original mastery, and presenting on its spacious canvas a greater wealth of observation, character and essential drama than was to be found in any other play of our time. The high opinion of Mr. Barker's talent which I there and then conceived was more than confirmed when *Waste* was produced in 1907 and *The Madras House* in 1910. I do not hesitate to say that I consider these three plays the biggest things our modern movement has produced. I cannot hope to justify this judgment in the time at my disposal. Indeed, since there seems to be no present hope of their revival, my estimate can only be understood by those who will read the plays, and bring to the reading a fair amount of scenic imagination. But I should be guilty of sheer cowardice if I did not tell you what I think of them. I re-read them the other day, almost hoping that I should have to screw down my admiration a peg or two. But it was no use; each of them is a dramatic creation of the very first order.

Mr. Barker has a peculiar technique of his own. He seeks unity, not so much in a given action or adventure as in a given social group, a *milieu*. *The Voysey Inheritance* introduces us into a suburban upper-middle-class home, the home of a wealthy family solicitor, father, mother, four sons and two daughters, with a son-in-law, two daughters-in-law and a female cousin thrown in. Each of these eleven personages is a character, sharply, firmly, memorably individualised.

There are only three characters outside the family, and two at least of these are brilliant studies. Servants apart, there are no mechanical personages in the play—personages with no independent life of their own, who exist simply to carry on the action. And what is the action? It arises from the fact, revealed to us within five minutes of the rise of

the curtain, that old Voysey, the intensely respectable, opulent family solicitor, lives by gambling with his clients' money—pays them the interest due from the gilt-edged securities in which it is supposed to be invested, while he is in fact using it in his own daring speculations, and living on the difference between four-and-a-half per cent and the precarious fruits of his gambling. He has long got over all scruple as to this method of procedure. He considers himself an eminently respectable citizen, differing from his neighbours only in the possession of financial genius. His son and partner, Edward, on the other hand, is appalled when this state of things is revealed to him; and the conflict between the two minds—the buccaneer and the moral valetudinarian—forms the matter of the first two acts. Then the father dies, and Edward, in a most admirable scene, has to reveal to his brothers and sisters the nature of "the Voysey inheritance." His first intention is to make public confession and throw the estate into bankruptcy, facing the probability of prison for himself. But he eventually decides to take an illegal course and carry on as long as he can, trying to replace the money stolen from poor clients who would be ruined, and letting the loss fall upon the rich who can afford to lose. This, of course, cannot go on for ever, and we leave him on the brink of discovery, but comforted by having at last won the whole heart of his cousin Alice Maitland, who had held critically aloof from him while she thought him a moral prig, or, as she rather affectedly put it, "one of God's dandies." Here are the last words of the play:

Edward. Will nothing ever happen to set me free? Shall I never be able to rest for a moment . . . turn round and say I've succeeded or I've failed?

Alice. That isn't what matters.

Edward. If they could all meet and agree, they might syndicate themselves and keep me at it for life.

Alice. What more could you wish for?

Edward. Than that dreary round!

Alice. My dear, the world must be put tidy. That's the work

which splendid criminals . . . and others leave about for us poor commonplace people to do.

Edward. (*With a little laugh.*) And I don't believe in Heaven, either.

Alice. (*Close to him.*) But there's to be our life. What's wrong with that?

Edward. My dear, when they put me in prison for swindling— (*He makes the word sound its worst.*)

Alice. I think they won't. But if they are so stupid . . . I must be very careful.

Edward. Of what?

Alice. To avoid false pride. I shall be foolishly proud of you.

Edward. It's good to be praised sometimes . . . by you.

Alice. My heart praises you. Good night.

Edward. Good night.

I am told that the legal aspect of *The Voysey Inheritance* is very carefully studied. Of its technical aspect I shall have something to say presently. In the meantime I can only re-state my conviction that as a delicate picture of manners and a profound study of character it has been surpassed, if at all, only by Mr. Barker himself.

Waste, indeed, is a larger, finer play—our greatest modern tragedy. I can scarcely doubt that it would have been a popular success, had an imbecile Censorship not vetoed its public production. As *The Voysey Inheritance* was a study of the wealthy middle-class, *Waste* gives us, on a still wider and more animated canvas, a picture of the governing class. It is a problem play—the problem being that which was brought home to us by more than one political tragedy during the last years of Queen Victoria—ought a breach of the dominant code of sexual morality to disable a man of commanding ability from serving the State? In the great scene of the play—practically, though not formally, a Cabinet council—it is decided that Henry Trebell's great talent must not be wasted; and yet his enemies are able to make indirect use of his lapse to place a fatal check on his political career. This scene, with its wonderful ebb and flow, and the astonishing richness of its characterisation, is, I think, the highest point yet reached in modern English drama. I

have room only for a very small extract from an earlier scene—that in which Lord Charles Cantelupe discusses with Trebell his scheme for devoting to education the revenues of the disestablished Church:

Trebell. That's an unhappy man or woman or nation. . . . I know it, if it has only come to me this minute . . . and I don't care what their brains or their riches or their beauty or any of their triumphs may be . . . they're unhappy and useless if they can't tell life from death.

Cantelupe. (*Interested in the digression.*) Remember that the Church's claim has ever been to know that difference.

Trebell. (*Fastening to his subject again.*) My point is this: A man's demand to know the exact structure of a fly's wing, and his assertion that it degrades any child in the street not to know such a thing, is a religious revival . . . a token of spiritual hunger. What else can it be? And we commercialize our teaching!

Cantelupe. I wouldn't have it so.

Trebell. Then I'm offering you the foundation of a new Order of men and women who'll serve God by teaching His children. Now shall we finish the conversation in prose?

Cantelupe. (*Not to be put down.*) What is the prose for God?

Trebell. (*Not to be put down either.*) That's what we irreligious people are giving our lives to discover.

Mr. Barker was born just about the time when *Our Boys* was considered the flower of the contemporary drama. Who would have conceived in 1877 that a child born in that year was destined to write such a play as *Waste* or such a passage of dialogue as that which I have just quoted? Can you wonder that, to a man who lived through the *Our Boys* period, the advance we have made seems miraculous and almost incredible?

The Madras House is a brilliant and scintillating comedy, passing in a novel *milieu* which Mr. Barker has closely studied, as he has all his environments—the world of drapery, dress-making and millinery. One of its most original and delightful characters is Mr. Eustace Perrin State, the

American apostle of big business, who buys up the Peckham drapery establishment of Messrs. Roberts and Huxtable, and the allied dress-making establishment of Mr. Constantine Madras. It was produced at the so-called Frohman Repertory Theatre in 1910, its first three acts achieving a brilliant success, and its fourth a melancholy failure. I never in all my experience felt such a sudden and decisive change in the temperature of an audience as that which occurred while this act dragged its slow length along. And this leads me to a few words on Mr. Barker's technique.

It may strike you as odd that, if Mr. Barker is such a remarkable playwright as I represent him to be, he should have made his fame as a producer, and should have no great popular success to his credit as an author. The reasons are somewhat complex. In the first place, his most powerful play, and the play most nearly approaching to the current constructive formula, was strangled at birth by the Censorship. Again, neither *The Voysey Inheritance* nor *The Madras House* was produced for a run by a regular management. They were both stamped from the outset as what may be called repertory plays. But even as repertory plays they have not enjoyed great popularity; and, what is perhaps most curious of all, they have not found their way to the American stage*—to the catholic-minded public which flocks even to such a play as *Heartbreak House*. What is the reason of this?

For one thing, all Mr. Barker's plays are difficult to cast. They demand a large number of more than competent actors. In *The Voysey Inheritance* there are sixteen important parts, in *Waste*, fifteen, in *The Madras House*, twenty. In these days of high salaries, such plays are not to be lightly undertaken.

But the real reason for Mr. Barker's unpopularity as a dramatist is that he does not avoid a defect which is too apt to be associated with the great quality of his technique. That great quality is the subordination of mere story to the portrayal of manners and character. He sees the necessity of

*This is no longer true of *The Madras House*.

keeping the interest of story alive, and does so, as a rule, with extraordinary skill. Many of his scenes, I will even say most, are positively tense with essential drama. But he is more concerned about the living tissues of a play than about its articulations, its skeleton; and this habit of mind, excellent in itself, carries with it an obvious danger. When a dramatist's primary object is to show two or three characters moving through a cunningly-developed story, he is seldom tempted to run to great length; but when there are a large number of characters to be illustrated, and the desire to get on with the story is relegated to a secondary plane, there is, so to speak, no automatic check upon the temptation to discursiveness. It cannot be denied that Mr. Barker sometimes yields to it. He frequently writes a little too much. There are perhaps not many scenes in his plays that would not gain by a certain compression; and some would bear a good deal. Moreover he has never entirely shaken off that preciosity of style, that over-rapidity and over-subtlety in the interplay of dialogue, which rendered his early and immature plays incomprehensible to me. He has not, in a word, quite hit the happy mean between the commonplace and the pretentious. Only once in these three plays has his craftsmanship quite deserted him—in the last act of *The Madras House*. I try in vain to see anything in it—or at any rate in the long concluding scene—except sheer talk with no dramatic interest. But even in his other plays he has not gained by never having had to consider the artistic uses of the blue pencil. He is a little apt to forget the limits set by nature to the normal human faculty of attention.

I hope that those of you who have not done so will read Mr. Barker's plays. If you do, I fear, or rather hope, that you will be apt to resent his stage-directions. He has unfortunately imitated Mr. Shaw in the detestable practice of constantly thrusting himself between the reader and the character, with clever, and facetious, and fussy comments. Each act is prefaced by a long sociological essay in the disguise of a description of scene and characters. This is to my mind undesirable, but comparatively innocuous. When once the

action has fairly begun, on the other hand, it seems to me that all intrusions of the author's personality are inartistic and annoying. The necessary stage-directions should be as impersonal and colourless as possible. We want to forget that there is such a person as the author while his characters are working out their destiny on the stage of our imagination.

I have left myself little time to deal with the works of Mr. John Galsworthy; but that matters the less as Mr. Galsworthy raises no critical problems like those presented by Mr. Shaw and Mr. Barker. He has written three of the finest plays of our time—*The Silver Box, Strife* and *Justice*—and one play a little more commonplace in texture, but showing extraordinary theatrical power—namely, *The Skin Game.* In his other plays there are points of great merit, but they are apt to seem a little thin, a little sketchy, in workmanship. One feels that Mr. Galsworthy works much more easily than either Mr. Shaw or Mr. Barker. He is not, like Mr. Shaw, intent on cramming his plays with social doctrine, turning ideas outside in, and, in a general way, standing the world on its head. He does not, like Mr. Barker, absorb himself in an intensive study of a particular *milieu.* He writes with quiet, easy mastery, telling, as a rule, a quiet simple story which enables him to contrast two social strata or social tendencies, and, without any didactic emphasis, suggesting, I will not say a humanitarian moral, but a strain of reflection antagonistic to the cruelties of life. In *The Silver Box,* an admirably composed play,* we have the stupid, conventional bourgeois household contrasted with the slum, and the impression we carry away is that in this unequal conflict of brainless wealth with helpless and feckless poverty, the one character of genuine worth is the heroic charwoman, a really beautiful creation. In *Strife* we survey the opposing camps of Capital and Labour, and we are made to feel the horrible wastefulness of the bitter obstinacy with which inevitable adjustments are opposed. In *Justice*—which I take to be Mr. Galsworthy's greatest work—we are made to realise

*Its opening scene is quoted in Lecture I.

with horror how the grim, inexorable machine of the law, once set in motion, will often, in despite of the good intentions of those who administer it, work incalculable mischief, and destroy human values which a little insight and sympathy might have rescued. *The Skin Game* shows the parvenu at odds with the squirearchy—a theme at least as old as Robertson—and again we find ourselves reflecting upon the needless and senseless evil wrought by man's inhumanity to man. All these works have what I am tempted to call a classic ease of composition and draughtsmanship. The structure is good, the characterisation clear and animated; there is nothing freakish, nothing excessive about any of them. Mr. Galsworthy, I take it, has never to resist the temptation to prolixity which besets Mr. Shaw and Mr. Barker—a temptation to which Mr. Shaw, at any rate, systematically yields, and glories in so doing. But few of us can escape the defects of our qualities. Mr. Galsworthy now and then lets his ease of production betray him into slightness of texture, insufficiency of elaboration. In all his plays there are fine qualities, but except these I have mentioned, I do not know that any of them take very firm hold upon either the imagination or the memory.*

In virtue of one short and rather unsuccessful play—*The Campden Wonder*—Mr. John Masefield takes his place among the Court Theatre, or Vedrenne-Barker, group of playwrights. We owe to him one very powerful and still more painful play, *The Tragedy of Nan.* I can scarcely think of another play in which human malignity and baseness are suffered to work such havoc. It seems to have drawn its inspiration from Thomas Hardy in his very blackest mood. In seeing it, I always feel that it somehow goes wrong in the third act, but cannot now attempt to justify that feeling. In spite of the unquestionable power of *Nan,* I am inclined to doubt whether Mr. Masefield is really a born dramatist. There seemed to be a lack of real grip in his handling of the great Japanese story of the Forty-seven Ronins, which he entitled *The Faithful.* I am not sure but

**Loyalties,* a brilliantly-told story, must now (1922) be added to the list.

that his splendidly imaginative *Philip the King* may one day rank as the finest thing he has done in dramatic form; but it, of course, is a lyric drama, a reversion to antique form, and quite outside the movement we are here tracing.

So far, my survey, from the Restoration onwards, has been restricted to the London theatre. There has been no reason, indeed, to look further afield. Down to the beginning of the present century, I can think of only one play of the slightest note that was not produced in London. That was Home's tragedy of *Douglas,* which, rejected by Garrick, first saw the light in Edinburgh in 1756. You may remember how, on its first night, an enthusiastic Scot in the gallery is reported to have cried, "Whaur's your Wullie Shakespeare noo?" The glory of *Douglas,* however, has not seriously dimmed Shakespeare's fame; and I do not remember any other play produced in the provinces which has left any mark in history, except one or two which, like Robertson's *Society,* were given a trial trip, a sort of dress-rehearsal, in the country before being brought to town. Soon after the turn of the century, however, there was a wide-spread movement for the establishment of local repertory theatres; and this eminently healthy movement begot in several places—but most notably in Dublin—a literature of its own. In my next lecture I shall begin by saying something of the Repertory Theatres, and shall then sum up the views which I have tried to place before you in these discourses.

XIV

Very shortly after the opening of the present century, there was an extraordinary outburst of what may best be described as dramatic impulse or instinct all over these islands. I call it an outburst, not a revival, for the evidence as to the previous existence of any such phenomenon is not very clear. It is true that, in the late middle ages and early Renaissance, religious plays and allegorical moralities—one of which survives in *Everyman*—were acted in various provincial cities and at the Universities. The York, Chester and Coventry plays, etc., bear witness to a good deal of local activity. The whole subject of folk-plays, mummings, May-games, liturgical plays, guild plays, parish plays, and so on, is dealt with at large by Mr. E. K. Chambers in his invaluable volumes on *The Mediæval Stage*, which certainly leave the impression that the English people as a whole were histrionically inclined in a very high degree. But it is difficult to view such activities in perspective. We are apt to run three or four centuries together, and regard as endemic manifestations which may in fact have been very sporadic. I do not say that this mistake has been made, but only that I am not sure whether sufficient precautions have been taken against it. We know that when, in the fulness of time, the Elizabethan drama came into existence, it was a culture product, showing traces, indeed, of descent from the Middle Ages, but profoundly modified by classical and Italian influences. And it was rooted in the metropolis. Strolling players, no doubt, perambulated the provinces, but we do not hear of a single provincial theatre or resident provincial company. Even the Universities contributed very little to the Elizabethan drama. Many playwrights were university men, but London was the scene of their life-work. Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, local drama, if it existed at all, survived only in the form

of degenerate mummer-plays, the meaning of which was more than half forgotten. After the Restoration, indeed, local playhouses began to be established, and during the eighteenth century even quite insignificant provincial towns had permanent buildings described as theatres, where plays were given during a month or six weeks of every year by the company serving the local "circuit," as it was called—that is to say, a group of small towns for which one manager catered. Those were the palmy days of Mr. Vincent Crummles and his kind. The "circuits" contributed many famous families to the aristocracy of the stage; for instance, the Kemble family, the Robertson family (including T. W. Robertson and Mrs. Kendal), the Wilton family, including Lady Bancroft, and the Terry family. But though the provincial theatres, great and small, were nurseries of acting, they added nothing to drama. If, now and then, a local tragedy or comedy was produced, it was entirely insignificant—Home's *Douglas,* which I mentioned in my last lecture, was scarcely an exception. The provinces were wholly dependent on London for their supplies. Dramatic production was absolutely centralised. The metropolis was "the very pulse of the machine."

If, then, the outburst of wide-spread dramatic interest and ambition which occurred some twenty years ago is to be regarded as a revival of instincts which had been similarly wide-spread in the Middle Ages, we must at any rate admit that these instincts had been rather profoundly dormant for more than three centuries. The mere fact that the provinces sent a certain number of stage-struck youths to London—with one William Shakespeare at their head—cannot be regarded as a proof of any widely-diffused proclivity to histrionics. But about the turn of the century, and from that point onward to the fatal epoch of 1914, there was a quite extraordinary efflorescence of dramatic ardour and assiduity. The first unmistakable symptom was the series of local pageants, which combined the gentry and commonalty of quite a number of towns in open-air celebrations of municipal history. The earliest and best of the pageant-masters was

Mr. Louis N. Parker, who organised admirable shows at Sherborne in 1905, Warwick in 1906, Bury St. Edmunds in 1907, Dover in 1908, Colchester in 1909. The movement was taken up with such enthusiasm that it temporarily added a word to the language—the verb "to paj." Unfortunately it was greatly overdone. Competition, the mortal enemy of art, stepped in, and even before the war it was evident that, for the time at any rate, pageants had had their day. But they were only the most conspicuous sign of a general hankering after dramatic expression. Village players and community players sprang up on every hand. Folk-dancing was revived along with folk-song. And in these little local enterprises there was a strong tendency to include all the arts of the theatre. The amateur companies not only made their own dresses and painted their own scenes, but often wrote their own plays. Even the war could not crush out the stirrings of dramatic instinct and ambition. The British soldier took them with him wherever he went; and in the base camps and rest camps semi-amateur companies acted before appreciative audiences plays of a higher class than any that were to be seen on the London stage of thirty years earlier.

It was by no mere chance, we may be sure, that the pageant movement and the Repertory Theatre movement came into being almost simultaneously. They were concurrent results of one and the same impulse towards dramatic expression; and in each case the desire to make money, if it existed at all, played a quite secondary part. I suppose some of the pageants cleared their expenses, but if so it was only because the hundreds of performers gave their services, and incidentally the service of their horses, gratis; and, even so, I understand that many of them resulted in large drafts upon their guarantee-funds. As for the repertory theatres, they were all either frankly endowed, or carried on for the love of the thing by people who hoped at most to make a living wage out of their work.

I have already mentioned how the liberality of Miss A. E. F. Horniman procured for Mr. Bernard Shaw his first

regular production. In 1904 the same lady gave her support to the company of Irish players which opened the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, as the Irish National Theatre. The history of this undertaking shows how a little seed of sacrifice, sown in fertile ground, may bring forth an almost miraculous harvest. The actors were all local amateurs, who taught themselves their craft, and the authors were for the most part young Irishmen, William Boyle, Padraic Colum and others, who wrote humorous and satiric plays of peasant life, showing a great deal of observation and knowledge, but little or no skill in construction or elaboration. Mr. W. B. Yeats contributed one or two plays, notably *The King's Threshold* and the beautiful symbolic playlet, *Kathleen-ni-Houlihan;* but this first of Irish poets is scarcely a born dramatist. Lady Gregory produced several original and delightful little pieces, which might perhaps be best called drolls: such as *Hyacinth Halvey*, *The Workhouse Ward* and *Spreading the News*. And then the weird and tragic beauty of a one-act play, *Riders to the Sea,* introduced us to a man of real genius, J. M. Synge. In *The Well of the Saints* and especially in *The Play-boy of the Western World,* Synge produced masterpieces of a sort of melancholy humour which is peculiarly his own; and in his unfinished, or at all events unrevised, *Deirdre,* he gave us the finest of the many dramatic versions of that loveliest of legends. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is none the less true, that Synge, writing almost exclusively in the Irish dialect, has none the less produced some of the most beautiful English of our time. His early death was an irreparable loss to dramatic literature.

Putting Synge's plays apart—for they are truly unique—we may say that a certain tenuity, an over-simplicity of structure, was the mark of the Irish drama during the earlier years of the Abbey Theatre. But that gallant little enterprise has produced one playwright who has not only observation and imagination, but a highly-developed sense of structure. Mr. Lennox Robinson, for some years manager of the Irish company, has given two very noteworthy plays

not only to the Irish but to the English-speaking stage. *The Lost Leader* is one of the most imaginative plays of our time, utilising with admirable tact and skill a legend (wholly groundless I believe) which clings to the memory of the Uncrowned King of Ireland, Charles Stewart Parnell. A hypnotist doctor, Powell-Harper by name, is staying with his friend Frank Ormsby at an out-of-the-way fishing hotel in Ireland. It is run by a capable woman, Mary Lenihan, with whom lives her old uncle, Lucius Lenihan, a tall, white-bearded man, rather bent and enfeebled. Dr. Powell-Harper and Ormsby, meeting a roaming journalist, Augustus Smith, in the smoking-room, fall to discussing the peculiarities of this old man. Powell-Harper, rather to the disgust of Ormsby, who has known the family for twenty years, suggests that there is some mystery about him—"some crime, some disgrace, some misfortune in the background, something that makes him bury himself in one of the most remote spots of Ireland." Ormsby has to admit that old Lucius is a great dreamer, for he sleeps in the next room to him, and is awakened almost every night by his calling out in his sleep. The talk then turns to hypnotism, and, as it does so, some small errand brings old Lucius into the room. He sits down at a distance from the fireplace, around which the others are gathered, and they scarcely notice his presence. Powell-Harper tries, with partial success, to hypnotise Smith, but it is Lucius, intently watching the proceedings, who in effect falls under the spell:

Smith. (*Pulling himself together.*) Hallo! are you trying to hypnotise me? (*He gets up.*) Just for a minute, you know, looking at that bright twinkling shilling, I felt myself slipping away. How queer. . . . By jove, look at the old man.

(*They all turn and stare at Lucius, who has sunk into a chair by the table. He lies half across it.*)

Frank. What's happened? Lucius! (*There is no answer. Frank goes to him and lays his hand on his arm.*) Lucius! (*No answer.*) He's asleep.

Harper. (*Cooly.*) No. Hypnotised.

Smith. Hypnotised!

Frank. (*With real indignation.*) Look here, Jim, I won't have you playing monkey-tricks on poor old Lucius.

Harper. I'm playing no tricks. I wasn't thinking of the old fellow. I was trying to put Mr. Smith to sleep.

Smith. But he was watching you. I remember noticing his—his sort of hungry expression when you spoke of a dreamless sleep. Can you wake him? I mean get him out of his hypnotic state?

Harper. Of course, easily.

Frank. Well, for goodness' sake, do.

Harper. Why shouldn't I let him rest happily for a few minutes? You say he sleeps badly; he's quiet enough now.

Frank. I hate these unnatural things.

Harper. I don't agree that it's unnatural. But all right, I'll wake him; but I'm going to give him a post-hypnotic suggestion.

Frank. What the devil's that?

Harper. I'm going to suggest to him that he'll sleep well tonight. As this will improve your chance of a night's rest, I take it you don't object.

Frank. (*Muttering.*) Oh, do what you like.

Harper. Mr. Lenihan! (*Lucius stirs slightly.*) Mr. Lenihan, sit up. I have something to say to you. (*Lucius struggles to sit up.*) Sit up straight. You can, perfectly well . . . straight. (*Lucius sits up straight.*) You sleep badly, don't you? (*Lucius bows his head.*) Answer me; you are able to speak.

Lucius. (*In a very low voice.*) Yes.

Harper. Speak louder, please.

Lucius. (*Loudly.*) Yes.

Harper. That's better. Tonight you are going to sleep soundly.

Lucius. (*Uneasily.*) I can't, I can't.

Harper. You mean your dreams will keep you from sound sleep?

Lucius. Yes, the dreams of twenty years ago. They come back, they come back.

Harper. Quite so. But now I am going to take them away.

Lucius. Right away?

Harper. Yes. (*He takes the cigar-box, empties it of the half-dozen cigars it contains and holds it up.*) Look, I'm going to take your bad dreams and shut them up in this box, and tie a big stone to it and drop it in the lake, and there they will lie.

Lucius. For ever?

Harper. For ever. There they go. One, two, three, four.
Lucius. I have more than that.
Harper. I have room for more. (*In a low voice.*) Hard luck on your cigars, Frank! . . . We'll name the bad dreams as we put them in. Here's the first. What is it called?
Lucius. A coffin.
Harper. Good. (*He places a cigar in the box.*) There goes the coffin. Now the next?
Lucius. A woman.
Harper. (*Dropping in a cigar.*) There she is, in the coffin.
Lucius. (*Excitedly.*) No, no, she's not. I'm in the coffin.
Harper. My mistake. I beg your pardon. A coffin and a woman. Now the third?
Lucius. My false friends.
Harper. (*Dropping a cigar in.*) They're gone. The fourth?
Lucius. My name.
(*There is a little stir of surprise.*)
Harper. Your name?
Frank. For God's sake, stop this, Jim. I don't like it; it's not fair. He doesn't know what he is saying.
Smith. But it's dashed exciting. A regular threepenny novelette. A coffin, a woman, false friends, his name—what does it all mean?
Frank. It's none of our business.
Harper. (*Dropping in a cigar.*) There goes your name—Lucius Lenihan.
Lucius. No, no, that's not it, that's not my name.
Harper. You're right. Beg pardon. I can't read the name. But as you're ashamed of it, we'll drop it in and say no more about it.
Lucius. (*Vehemently.*) I was never ashamed of it. My name, sir, is Charles Stewart Parnell.
Frank. Par—
Smith. (*Laughing.*) The poor old man!
Harper. Go to sleep. Go sound to sleep.
(*Lucius sinks down on the table.*)

The effect of this passage, well acted, is extraordinarily thrilling. It is built, of course, upon the rumour that Parnell did not really die in 1891—that no one ever saw him in his coffin, which in fact contained the body of an unknown Russian immigrant. Similar legends almost always arise when a very eminent man dies under circumstances which

can possibly be regarded as mysterious. We all know how it was reported on the very best authority, and believed by thousands of people, that Lord Kitchener survived the loss of the *Hampshire* and was a prisoner in Berlin. In the case of Parnell there was just enough plausibility in the story to enable us to regard Mr. Robinson's play with that momentary suspension of disbelief which is sufficient for the dramatist's purposes. The remainder of the play seemed to me as happily inspired as the beginning. Some people thought the last act an anticlimax, but I could not take that view. It seemed to me very fine and moving.

Mr. Robinson's later play, *The White-Headed Boy*, may be compendiously described as the perfection of peasant comedy. It has not its rival in the English language. It continues and consummates the tradition established at the very birth of the Irish Theatre, showing all the merits and none of the defects of earlier plays by Robinson himself and other writers of his school. Not only in observation and in humour, but also in construction, it is above reproach —a work of which any literature might be proud.

After a couple of years or so, Miss Horniman withdrew her financial aid from the Dublin theatre. Whether it then became self-suporting I cannot say; but if so it can only have been because all connected with it were content to work simply for a living wage and the love of the thing. Much can be done by a theatre which adopts the motto, "Plain living, high thinking, sincere writing and unselfish acting"; but in these days it is not an easy motto to live up to.

Be this as it may, Miss Horniman, in 1907, transferred her activity to Manchester, taking in turn the Midland Theatre and the Gaiety Theatre. Here the history of the Dublin enterprise repeated itself—as soon as there was a local theatre in existence, not merely supplied by an A, B, or C touring combination from London, but possessing its own established company, local playwrights of talent sprang up as if by magic. Lancashire life was no longer portrayed by melodramatists who did not know Lancashire from Lilliput, but

by artists, native and to the manner born, who sincerely interpreted both its comedy and its tragedy. The leading figure of the Manchester school was undoubtedly Stanley Houghton, whose early death was as great a loss to the English theatre as was that of J. M. Synge to the Irish. His *Younger Generation* was a play of great promise, which was amply fulfilled a couple of years later in *Hindle Wakes*, a play full of local colour, but at the same time of poignant humanity. I have already spoken, in my fifth lecture, of the opening scene in which Fanny Hawthorn returns from her illicit escapade to find that a tragic accident has betrayed her secret to her parents. If Miss Horniman's enlightened public spirit had brought into being nothing but this one scene, it would not have been thrown away. The thing is absolutely real: not an unnatural word is spoken, and the sequence of incidents involves no departure from the normal and probable course of life: yet we cannot but feel in the atmosphere of the dingy Lancashire sitting-room that strain of suspense, that throb of emotion, which was, is, and ever shall be the central secret of drama—that which differentiates it from all other arts, and lends it such irresistible magic. A better piece of drama than this opening scene was never written—which is not to say, of course, that the author was a superlative, or even a very great dramatist. He was merely using with skill and originality an instrument which had been perfected for him by scores of predecessors during half a century of rapid evolution. There is no evidence in *Hindle Wakes* of a large mind, a great imagination or a profound criticism of life. What we see is simply an alert intelligence, a keen eye for character, and fine technical instinct. The greatness of a work of art is ultimately dependent upon the greatness of the mind behind it. But a comparatively small mind, working with a perfect instrument, can sometimes produce very admirable results, while the labour of a great mind may sometimes be obscured and almost nullified by the imperfections of its instrument. The point which I am trying with tedious insistence to impress upon you is that in the realistic method,

as evolved in France and amplified by Ibsen, we have for the first time in history a pure, a logical and an infinitely subtle instrument of dramatic expression.

Mr. Allan Monkhouse is another Manchester playwright of note, whose work has as yet scarcely reached London. On the other hand, we have seen several clever plays by Mr. Harold Brighouse. I remember in particular a racy Lancashire comedy, *Hobson's Choice,* not quite unworthy of a place on the same shelf with *The White-Headed Boy.*

Wherever a Repertory Theatre has been established there has been a more or less marked outcrop of local talent. I saw in Liverpool a very witty *revue* by a local author, Mr. Ronald Jeans, acted by the Repertory Company. There is plenty of room on a healthy stage for parody and extravaganza of this description. Even musical comedy is, in itself, an admirable art form; the pity is that it has so commonly fallen into the hands of stupid and vulgar people.

A Repertory Theatre in Glasgow proved conclusively that Sir James Barrie was by no means the only Scot who possessed real dramatic instinct. I do not know whether the architecturally dignified and delightful Repertory Theatre in Birmingham has evoked any strictly-speaking local talent; but it enabled Mr. John Drinkwater to develop his remarkable powers, and it witnessed the first production of his *Abraham Lincoln,* an international event of real importance. I have seldom seen anything that moved me more than the performance in New York of this portraiture by an English author of the greatest of Americans. The play had been running for months, yet the theatre was crowded; and it has since, I believe, met with similar success wherever it has gone throughout the length and breadth of America.

This reminds me to say that the outburst of dramatic instinct and ambition has been no less marked and widespread in America than in England, though it has taken somewhat different forms. So-called "Little Theatres" and Community Theatres have sprung up all over the country and have brought to the front several playwrights of notable talent. An admirable organisation, the Theatre Guild of New York,

has secured for the interesting work of Mr. St. John Ervine a larger public than it has found on this side. More notable, because more distinctively American, work has been done by the Provincetown Players, who brought to the front, in Mr. Eugene O'Neill, a dramatist of highly original, though rather sombre and violent, genius. His *Anna Christie* and *The First Man* are works of astonishing power. The movement in America has been powerfully promoted by the Universities, where professorships of dramatic literature are held by very able men, keenly interested in the modern drama. At Harvard there is even a dramatic workshop, under the control of Professor George Pierce Baker, where not only the technique of playwriting, but the arts of stage decoration, costuming and lighting, are seriously studied. English Universities, unfortunately, show little tendency to follow suit. By studiously ignoring the living stage, they help to maintain the exaggerated prestige of the ancient drama. I hope that Mr. Granville-Barker's appointment to a readership at Liverpool may mark the beginning of a more enlightened policy. Perhaps I may also be allowed to regard the present course of lectures as an encouraging symptom.

Let me now, in one rapid survey, recall to you the ground we have traversed.

The secular, as distinct from the religious and merely edifying, drama came into being almost simultaneously in England, France and Spain, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It attained maturity more rapidly in England and Spain than in France; and between 1590 and 1610 Shakespeare had produced in London about a dozen plays which remain, by common consent, the supreme masterpieces of the modern European drama. His generation comprised ten or a dozen other playwrights of great poetic and rhetorical power; but none of them approached him in specifically dramatic genius, and most of them availed themselves with fatal gusto of the facilities offered by the very undeveloped platform stage, by the gross appetite of the groundlings for melodramatic horrors and

comic ribaldries, and by the unquestioned currency of soliloquies, asides, disguises and other labour-saving conventions. Thus the days of Elizabeth and James present the surprising spectacle of one towering world-genius rubbing shoulders with, and scarcely, if at all, distinguished from, a group of writers of considerable talent, indeed, but deplorably infected with the crudities and brutalities of their period. These crudities and brutalities did not, certainly, leave Shakespeare untouched, but in his best work he soared immeasurably above them. It has been the regrettable tendency of nineteenth-century criticism to minimise the gulf that separates Shakespeare from his contemporaries. I do not see how any unprejudiced student can deny that the minor Elizabethan drama, with all its vigour and lustihood, with all its lyric and rhetorical talent, is an essentially barbarous product—much more so, at any rate, than any other dramatic literature, ancient or modern.

The Civil War led to a twenty-years' suspension of all dramatic development. The drama revived with the return of Charles II; and from the Restoration we may date the birth of the modern theatre. Before that time the bare platform stage had exhibited humours and passions abstracted, so to speak, from their visual environment; and female parts had been played by boys. With the introduction of scenery and of actresses the evolution of the modern picture-stage began, though vestiges of the platform stage clung to it down to our own time.

We saw that it was a mistake to attribute to the French theatre any considerable influence upon the British theatre under Charles II. The Restoration drama, both in tragedy and comedy, continued the Elizabethan tradition, Beaumont and Fletcher and Massinger being the chief models in tragedy, Ben Jonson in comedy. A passing fashion for rhyme in tragedy was no doubt Gallic in origin; but it was the rhyme only that came from France: neither in matter nor in manner could the so-called heroic plays claim any kinship to the noble sanity and refinement of Corneille and Racine. Unrhymed tragedy, in the hands of Lee and Otway, became

an art of sheer rant and bluster; and this ideal of tragedy prevailed for something like a hundred and fifty years, down to the days of Sheridan Knowles. It must be remembered, however, that in these dismal concoctions of vulgar bombast, great actors and actresses contrived, for more than a century, to produce astonishing effects upon the emotions, or more properly, perhaps, upon the nerves, of their audiences.

Comedy, though it built upon an Elizabethan and not a French basis, had to deal with manners which had made considerable progress, one can scarcely say in refinement, but in urbanity. The coffee-house had to some extent supplanted the tavern, and the drawing-room, the domain of modish conversation, had come, or was coming, into being. Thus Restoration comedy soon shook off the sheer mediævalism which clung to its Elizabethan models; but, under the influence of a dissolute court, it fell into a brutal cynicism and coarseness which has no parallel in any other civilised literature. At the very end of the seventeenth century, Jeremy Collier gave emphatic utterance to the detestation of the enormities of the comic stage which had for some time been growing among decent people; and Dryden, himself a sad offender, but nevertheless a great and sane man of genius, admitted the justice of the protest. I ventured to hint to you that the modern æstheticism which scoffs at Collier as a fanatic, and professes to take a refined pleasure in the sheer nauseousness of Wycherley and Congreve, is a paltry and not very healthy affectation.

Unfortunately the amelioration of theatrical manners which set in with Farquhar, Cibber and Steele, was not accompanied by any enlargement of the idea of comedy, or any deepening of its psychology. Verbal wit or smartness was still the chief virtue at which it aimed; and it still dealt almost exclusively with a traditional type of story, passing in a very narrow circle of upper-class London society. Thus it came to repeat itself with deadly tediousness. It showed no advance in technique, no new insight into character, no subtler or more enlightened criticism of life. Just as the eighteenth century was entering upon its last quarter,

the so-called comedy of manners flamed up into momentary brilliance in the works of Sheridan and Goldsmith, and then became extinct.

Meanwhile, about the middle of the century, one or two examples of a new form—to wit, domestic drama in prose—had achieved great popularity. In the last quarter of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century this form took the upper hand, in the works of Richard Cumberland, George Colman junior, Holcroft, Morton and others, in which comedy dwindled into "comic relief," while the serious scenes tended more and more towards melodrama. This tendency was strengthened by German influence, which for a time flooded the stage with sentimental extravagances and supernatural horrors.

In the eighteenth century, then, taken as a whole, we recognised a period of stagnation in authorship, while on the other hand we noted that rhetorical acting, both tragic and comic, flourished exceedingly. The theatre subsisted very largely upon its traditional repertory, while the new pieces which it produced either followed traditional models, or degenerated in the direction of a vulgar and melodramatic theatricalism. One reason of this stagnation must be sought, I suggest, in the fact that the mechanism of the theatre improved little, if at all. Lighting especially stood practically still. The only notable innovation was Garrick's introduction of footlights—perhaps a questionable boon. At all events, the stage of the eighteenth century was a candle-lit stage, on which there could be very little intensification or regulation of light. There can be no doubt that the possibilities of delicate regulation which came into being with gas and electricity greatly furthered that exact reproduction of the environment which lies at the base of modern drama.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the great tradition of rhetorical acting slowly declined and died out. Edmund Kean passed away in the 'thirties, Macready retired in 1851. Charles Kean in the 'fifties and 'sixties sought in spectacle and archæological pedantry a substitute for rhe-

torical vigour and accomplishment—a system which was cultivated in our own time by Sir Henry Irving and Sir Herbert Tree. Sadler's Wells, under Samuel Phelps, was the last refuge of true rhetorical acting, and of the repertory system which had prevailed since the Restoration. Meanwhile authorship was at its lowest ebb. We recognised in Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons* and *Richelieu* almost the only plays of the first half of the century that had any real vitality in them.

Then, about 1860, a new set of influences made themselves felt. The monopoly of the "legitimate" drama, enjoyed since the Restoration by the two patent theatres, had been abolished in 1843; playhouses increased in number and decreased in size; the introduction of new illuminants entirely altered the optics of the theatre; new fabrics lent variety and richness to the art of costuming; and Scribe and his contemporaries in France had developed a new technique in bourgeois comedy and drama which cut at the root of the old rhetorical conventions. All these conditions combined to render possible the pioneering work of T. W. Robertson, who, with scarcely any culture, and a very slender stock of creative talent, contrived to introduce a new atmosphere into the theatre—an atmosphere in which rhetoric gave place to naturalness, not to say triviality, of accent, and effect was sought and attained in the faithful reproduction of details of environment. Stage rooms no longer consisted of a back cloth with a fireplace and two chairs painted on it, three or four "wings" shoved on in grooves to represent the side walls, and two or three flapping "borders" in place of a ceiling. The so-called "box room" was introduced during the Robertsonian period at the Prince of Wales's—that is to say, a room with three walls and a ceiling, with doors that open and shut with real handles, and with such furniture as indicates at a glance the social *milieu* which the author desires to represent. These may seem small and mechanical details, but until such details were perfected the further development of modern drama would have been impossible. It may be added that it was the coming of the long-run

system, due to the enormous increase of population, that encouraged attention to such details. Let us give the long run its due: if it has terrible drawbacks, it has great compensations. And its drawbacks proceed almost entirely from its exclusive dominance. If we had the sense to maintain a fair proportion of repertory theatres alongside of the long-run theatres, we could view even the two thousand nights of *Chu Chin Chow* with perfect equanimity.

We saw how the death of Robertson in 1871 was followed by a period of fifteen years or so during which the hopes aroused by his genuine, though not very brilliant, spark of genius gave place to sheer despondency. James Albery belied the promise of *Two Roses;* H. J. Byron piled inanity upon inanity; the stage seemed to be slipping back into helpless dependence upon adaptation from the French. The fantastic comedies of W. S. Gilbert, indeed, showed a good deal of literary power; and towards the end of the period the series of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas did something to restore our dwindling self-respect.

Then, in the early 'eighties, the horizon began to lighten a little, and before the end of that decade it became evident that in Arthur Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Sydney Grundy, R. C. Carton and Haddon Chambers we had a group of playwrights of very real talent and ambition, who were at all events liberating us from our vassalage to France. It is true that they were all men of the theatre rather than men of letters. The quality of their work was technical rather than intellectual. But the instinct of the theatre is, after all, the first requisite of the true dramatist. Given that, other gifts may be added unto him; without that other gifts avail not.

In the early 'nineties the European theatre at large received what may be likened to a strong electric shock from the genius of Ibsen; and England, for all her insularity, responded to the stimulus. The talent of Arthur Pinero rapidly attained maturity; Henry Arthur Jones and other dramatists of the 'eighties went steadily forward; Oscar Wilde, though he merely played at play-writing, produced

comedies whose dazzling wit and charm of style almost blinded us to their essential poverty of thought and invention. J. M. Barrie revealed the exquisite originality of his fancy, and his remarkable instinct for the stage; and a queer humourist and paradoxist named Bernard Shaw began to attract attention.

It was not until the beginning of the new century, however, that the English drama reached its full intellectual stature. The years between the death of Queen Victoria and the cataclysm of 1914 witnessed a quite amazing outburst of dramatic activity. Sir Arthur Pinero did his best and ripest work; Bernard Shaw became the most famous dramatist in Europe; John Galsworthy proved himself as great a master of the stage as of the novel; Granville-Barker, though mainly occupied in producing the works of others, found time to add three great plays of his own to our dramatic literature; the Irish Theatre brought to the front many writers of talent, and one rare genius in the person of J. M. Synge; and wherever a repertory theatre was established in the provinces, it led to the discovery of local talent, perhaps not quite of the first order, but such as, twenty years earlier, would have seemed almost miraculous. America followed suit. Down to about 1895, the American stage had lived almost exclusively upon British plays and adaptations from the French. But with the new century it became evident that America was determined to see her own life with her own eyes; and today the native American play has not only, in great measure, ousted the British play from the American stage, but has begun to cross the Atlantic in large numbers. For ten years past we have constantly heard complaints of the American invasion of the London stage; and only the other day we read of the great success of *Potash and Perlmutter* in Berlin.

It may fairly be said, I think, that since the beginning of the century, a greater number and a greater variety of plays have been produced in the English language than in any other. In my rapid review I have had to pass quite unmentioned at least a score of writers who have done notable

work—far above the level of the best that was being produced thirty years ago. And if the English-speaking drama is remarkable in quantity, it is assuredly no less distinguished in quality. Though we are greatly behind France and Germany in theatrical organisation, we have so far overcome our disabilities that we need not fear comparison between our drama of the past twenty years and that of any other country.

In these twenty years, to put it briefly, the English drama has become one of the most fertile and flourishing provinces of English literature. But criticism has not yet awakened to the fact. Criticism continues either to ignore the living drama, or to speak of it in apologetic, if not contemptuous tones, that might have been justified fifty, or even thirty years ago, but are today as the voice of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. The doctrine which I have been preaching to you in these lectures, far from being orthodox, is extravagantly heretical—the doctrine, to wit, that the drama of these days is at least as fine a product of the human spirit as the Elizabethan drama, Shakespeare only apart, and is incomparably superior, technically, intellectually and morally, to the drama of the Restoration. Why is it that these things are concealed from the wise and learned, and their announcement left to mere journalists like myself?

One reason is to be found, I think, in sheer mental inertia. The habit of four or five generations is not to be thrown off in one. For something like a hundred and sixty years—from, say, 1730 to 1890—it was perfectly natural and right that men should look back to the Elizabethan Age, and even to the Restoration, as great periods of drama from which their own times had miserably declined. These sixteen decades of stagnation and puerility, with only one brief flicker of revival in the seventeen-seventies, set up a habit of pessimism which was only too well justified in its day. Men resigned themselves to the belief that the glories of English dramatic literature were all in the past, and, regarding the drama of their own time, were content to say, with the American satirist:

Lo, where the stage, the poor degraded stage,
Holds its warped mirror to a gaping age.

This habit has, for at least twenty years, been a sheer anachronism; but the pundits of criticism have not yet unlearnt it. Their awakening is further retarded by the fact that they have not acquired the art of reading realistic drama with imagination and enjoyment.

But something more than mere habit lies at the root of the critical overvaluation of ancient, and undervaluation of modern, drama. The fact is that what we very roughly call the realistic drama is a new thing for which orthodoxy has provided no pigeonhole in its critical apparatus. It has been so accustomed to appraise drama in virtue of inessentials, accidents, ornamental excrescences, that it has no eye for the stark essentials of mimetic art, divested of the illogical impurities which have clung to it through all the centuries of its evolution. Orthodoxy sees that drama has lost its adventitious trappings—the lyricism of tragedy, the verbal wit of comedy—and this purification it instinctively regards as mere impoverishment. The two opening paragraphs of a recent article in *The Times Literary Supplement* show very clearly the inclination of criticism to regard the non-dramatic elements in drama as its chief glories. The article appeared on May 26, 1921, under the heading of "Pure Literature." It opened thus:

In the greatest plays there are moments when the play ceases and something else happens; they arise out of the action of the play, but when they come, it is forgotten—

Thou remember'st
Since once I sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid, on a dolphin's back,
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath,
That the rude sea grew civil at her song.

The actor, saying that, should cease to be an actor, should cease to be Oberon even; he, Oberon, and the play, should lose themselves in that music as the singer and Cherubino and the opera are lost when "Voi che sapete" begins. Mozart and Shakespeare are subject to fits of a divine absence of mind in which they are

called into another state of being, and carry us with them. They too are listening to a music which supersedes even their delightful business; with a wave of the hand they stop it so that the whole world may listen too.

Any pretext, any turn of events, may bring these moments; they happen even at the height of tragedy, when we are absorbed in the issue. Lear and Cordelia enter prisoners, and then Lear ceases to be Lear and the play to be a play—

> We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
> When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
> And ask of thee forgiveness; so we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too—
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
> And take upon 's the mystery of things,
> And if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
> In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.

There is eternity in the sound of the words as well as in the sense; circumstance falls away like scenery, and a universal voice is heard speaking the language of the absolute.

I will not discuss the question whether the actor, in delivering these passages, should "cease to be an actor," should "cease to be Oberon" or Lear, and deliberately concentrate upon musical effect, as Cherubino does in singing "Voi che sapete." This seems to me a rather gratuitous insistence upon the impurity of the form; but it does not here concern us. The interest of the passage lies in its placid assumption that the highest drama must always partake of the nature of opera, and present life steeped, as it were, in an artificial medium of music.

I entirely agree with the *Times* essayist that the highest drama known to us, the drama of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Shakespeare, is, as a matter of fact, in great measure operatic. In such masterpieces as *Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* we are moved quite as much by miracles of verbal melody, as by the dramatic action, magnificent as that often is. It would be crude and premature to maintain that any example of the purified modern art, which

reached maturity only some half a century ago, stands on the same plane with these august achievements of the past. Ibsen, indeed, has shown that the realistic formula by no means excludes "harps in the air" if the master has the art to touch them. But we cannot possibly pretend to see even Ibsen, and much less any living writer, in his just perspective, or to co-ordinate them with the giants of old. For the moment, we confess freely and unreservedly that the greatest tragedies as yet known to us were produced at a time when the drama still came trailing clouds of musical glory from the rites of nature-worship and ancestor-worship in which it took its rise.

But the experience of three centuries has shown us that the spirit of modern man can no longer produce masterpieces in the impure form in which Shakespeare worked. A thousand attempts to do so have all proved more or less abortive. The two elements of the old drama, imitation and lyrical passion, have at last consummated their divorce. For lyrical passion we go to opera and music drama, for interpretation through imitation we go to the modern realistic play. And surely we ought to recognise that this divorce, so obviously inevitable, is a good and not a bad thing—a sign of health and not of degeneracy. It is a rank absurdity to scoff at or ignore a form which, in its half-century of life, has given us in Norway *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm* and *The Master Builder*, in Germany *Der Biberpelz* and *Fuhrmann Henschel*, *Heimat* and *Fritzchen*, In Italy *La Gioconda*, in France *La Parisienne* and *Amoureuse*, in England *The Thunderbolt* and *Mid-Channel*, *Strife* and *Justice*, *Candida* and *John Bull's Other Island*, *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Waste*, in Ireland *The White-Headed Boy* and *The Playboy of the Western World*, in America *Griffith Davenport* and *Beyond the Horizon*, *The Truth* and *The Climbers*. Let us realise and not be afraid to assert that we are living, not in a very poor, but in a very rich period of dramatic literature, and that to that literature our own country has contributed even more than her proportionate share.

The movement, checked by the war, shows every sign of

renewing its vigour, if only we give it a chance. And we can all of us further it by taking thought for the drama, by doing our best to remedy the glaring faults in our theatrical organisation, by founding and fostering local repertory theatres, and by giving active support to what is relatively good in drama, and turning our feet away from what is base and contemptible. Let us not be discouraged by one or two comparatively barren seasons. Such fluctuations there will always be. And above all let us make a firm stand against the essentially ignorant fashion of praising the past at the expense of the present. Let us not work ourselves up into paroxysms of modish enthusiasm over plays which never were really great, which were conspicuously of an age and not for all time, and which, acted by modern actors, cannot possibly produce upon modern audiences the effect at which their authors aimed. Let us beware of æsthetic attitudinizing, that most barren form of affectation. Let us not forget the manifest distinction between the antiquarian interest of, say, a play like *The Duchess of Malfy*, and the perennial vitality of *Hamlet* or *Julius Cæsar*. Above all, let us not ridiculously reverse the saying that a living dog is better than a dead lion, by jeering at living lions while we bow down and worship dead dogs.

THE END

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